

APRIL 1991
\$2.25 U.S.
\$2.95 CAN.

ANNIVERSARY

ELLERY QUEEN'S

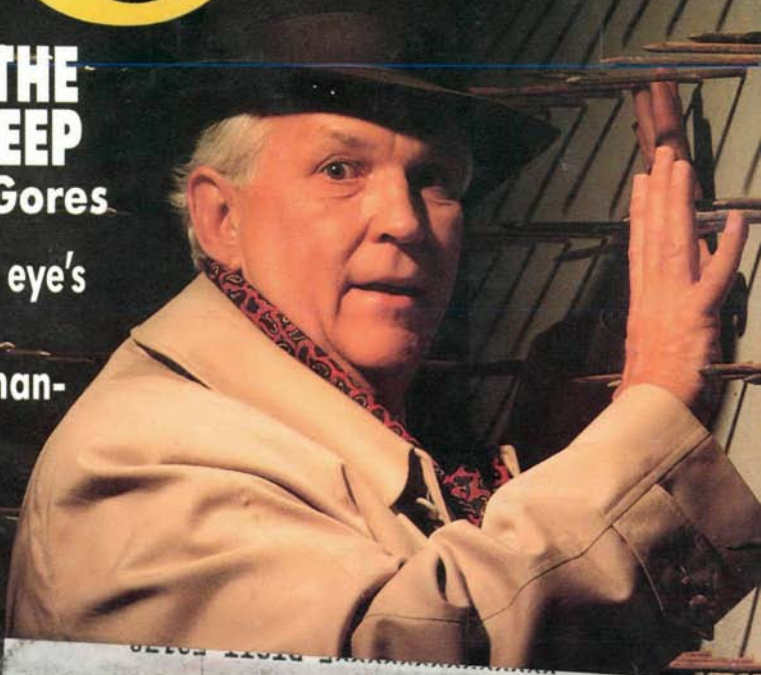
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

APRIL 1991
\$2.25 U.S.
\$2.95 CAN.

SLEEP THE BIG SLEEP

by Joe Gores

**A private eye's
search
for a woman-
ating
idnap**



36006 0 387166 9

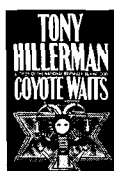
*****5-DIGIT 50125
25R0G 31602 /BUX9X 20
79 MIN91 ELQ ED 00000
AB
LINDA RODGERS
602 S BUXTON
INDIANOLA IA 50125-3239

Gores
pages
& 64)

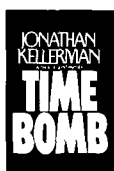
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



0760 \$18.95/\$8.98



3368 \$19.95/\$7.98



0075 \$19.95/\$9.98



0414 \$11.98x



0091 \$15.95/\$7.98



1495 \$18.95/\$7.98



0471 \$18.95/\$7.98



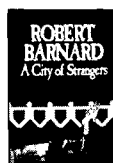
0034 \$18.95/\$7.98



2015 \$22.95/\$8.98



Take any
6 books for 99¢
when you join *Mystery Guild*



0620 \$17.95/\$7.98



0638 \$19.95/\$8.98



2600 \$16.95/\$7.98

HERE'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOUR MEMBERSHIP IS ACCEPTED . . .

A GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION. If you're not 100% satisfied with your books, return them within 10 days at our expense and owe nothing. The Club Tote is your free gift to keep.

HUGE DISCOUNTS ON HARDCOVER BOOKS. Save as much as 60% off publishers' edition prices. Club books are sometimes altered in size to fit special presses.

THE FREE CLUB MAGAZINE. You'll receive up to 15 issues a year. Each issue reviews the Featured Book Selection(s) plus a wide variety of alternate books from the Club's extensive library.

SHOPPING MADE SIMPLE. To get the Featured Book Selection(s), *do nothing*—it will be sent automatically. If you prefer another book—or none at all—simply return your Member Reply Form by the specified date. A shipping and handling charge is added to each order.

AN EASY-TO-MEET OBLIGATION. Take up to 1 year to buy 4 more books at regular low Club prices. Afterwards, you may resign membership anytime.

RISK-FREE RETURN PRIVILEGES. If you get an unwanted book because your Club magazine was delayed and you had less than 10 days to respond, simply return the book at our expense.

Prices in fine print are for publishers' hardcover -- editions.

Prices in bold print are for Club hardcover editions.

x Hardcover edition exclusively for Club members
* Explicit scenes and/or language



FREE TOTE
with membership

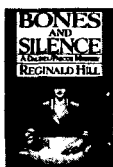
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



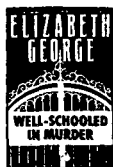
3376 \$18.95/\$7.98



2889 \$18.95/\$7.98



6551 \$17.95/\$7.98



6544 \$17.95/\$7.98



*2352 \$18.95/\$11.98



7385 \$8.98x



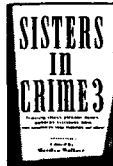
1115 \$15.95/\$7.98



3061 \$16.95/\$7.98



6315 \$19.95/\$7.98



2055 \$8.98x



*9852 \$19.95/\$11.98



6494 \$17.95/\$6.98



1818 \$18.95/\$8.98



0174 \$17.95/\$8.98



0778 \$18.95/\$7.98



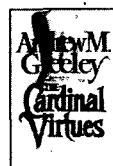
0406 \$18.95/\$7.98



8011 \$16.95/\$7.98



0588 \$19.95/\$11.98



0562 \$19.95/\$11.98



*0166 \$18.95/\$10.98



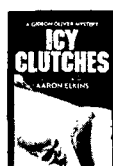
6577 \$25.00/\$12.98



9886 \$19.95/\$11.98



8372 \$19.95/\$8.98



0553 \$16.95/\$7.98

MYSTERY GUILD

MAIL TO: Mystery Guild, 6550 East 30th Street
P.O. Box 6362, Indianapolis, IN 46206-6362

Please write book numbers here:

YES! Please enroll me in *Mystery Guild* according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 6 BOOKS I've indicated—plus my FREE CLUB TOTE. Bill me just 99¢, plus shipping and handling.

SAVE MORE—BUY YOUR FIRST BOOK NOW FOR \$2.49!

☐ Send me the book I've indicated and reduce my commitment to only 3 more books. Bill me just \$2.49, plus shipping and handling.

(write book number)

--	--	--	--

18230

20

Mr./Mrs.
Miss/Ms.

please print

Address

Apt.

City

State

Zip

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. We reserve the right to reject any application.

EQM4/91

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contents

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE **ELLERY QUEEN®**

From Another World _____	Clayton Rawson 4
CU: Mannix _____	Richard Matheson 32
The Problem of the Blue Bicycle _____	Edward D. Hoch 44
EQMM 50th Anniversary Contest _____	62
Sleep the Big Sleep _____	Joe Gores 64
The Jury Box _____	Jon L. Breen 82
New Money _____	Patrick Irelan 85
The Baltman Bird's-Eye View _____	James Powell 91
The Haircut _____	Timothy Watts 105
Mostly Me _____	Janwillem van de Wetering 115
Blessed Are the Meek _____	Georges Simenon 124



**On our cover is
JOE GORES**

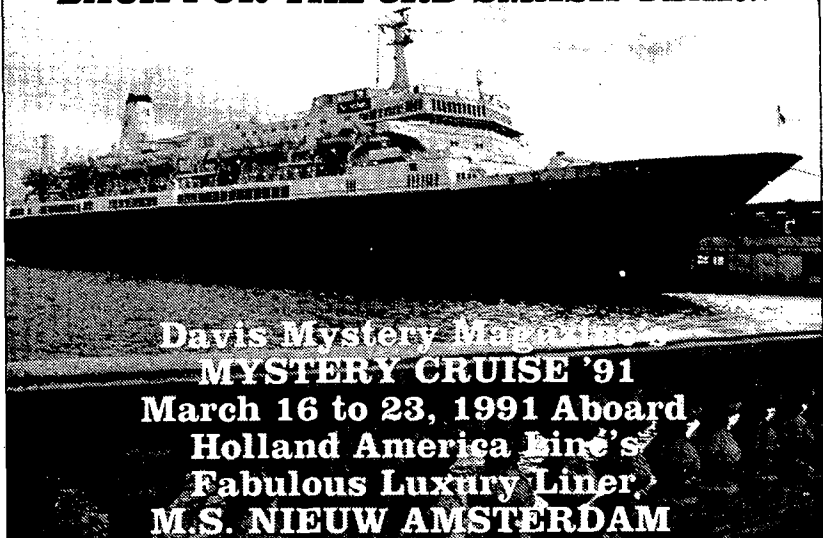
Cover Photograph by Peter Papadopolous

Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Note: indicia on page 159

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BACK FOR THE 3RD SMASH YEAR!!



**Davis Mystery Magazine's
MYSTERY CRUISE '91
March 16 to 23, 1991 Aboard
Holland America Line's
Fabulous Luxury Liner,
M.S. NIEUW AMSTERDAM**

Sail from Tampa, Florida to the beautiful Western Caribbean for an exciting sun-and fun filled week. Enjoy the very best that luxury cruising offers, *PLUS* many special Mystery Cruise events. There will be an On-Board Mystery created just for Mystery Cruise participants, *plus* special guests including Eleanor Sullivan, Editor of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, and, by popular demand, guest author George Baxt. Trivia Contests, private parties, great gifts and prizes, and *lots* of surprises!

When not enjoying all the ship-board activities or the Mystery fun you'll have a great time in the wonderful ports of call which include: colorful Key West, Florida; Cozumel, Mexico; Ocho Rios, Jamaica; and Georgetown, Grand Cayman.

Prices for Mystery Cruise include round-trip air fare and start at

\$1209

per person, double occupancy from most major cities. There is limited availability in some accommodation categories. First come, first served.

BOOK EARLY . . . SPACE IS LIMITED . . . PAYMENT PLAN IS AVAILABLE.

To be part of this fabulous week and to receive all the special amenities, you must book your cruise through:

OMNI GROUP CRUISES, INC.

6513 Hollywood Blvd. Ste. 205, Hollywood, CA 90028

Write or call for more information (800) 876-OMNI

Please send me more information about Mystery Cruise '91

Name _____ (please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone () _____

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ISSUE #582—DEDICATED TO CLAYTON RAWSON

Clayton Rawson was managing editor of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine from 1963 to 1970. Before then, he had been associate editor of True Detective Magazine, editor of Master Detective Magazine, mystery-book editor for Ziff-Davis, director of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club, and editor of Inner Sanctum Mysteries at Simon and Schuster—all the while leading a double life as the magician, the Great Merlini, who himself led a double life as a detective in Clayt's twelve published mystery stories, all of which appeared in EQMM and all of which also feature journalist Ross Harte.

"From Another World" is the first of four stories Clayt wrote with Harte as narrator—the other eight switch the point of view. We're sure he had a good deceitful reason for this, and that you'll find it great fun (if you haven't already) to be fooled by the wonderful wizard of detection that was Clayton Rawson . . .

FROM ANOTHER WORLD

by **CLAYTON RAWSON**

It was undoubtedly one of the world's strangest rooms. The old-fashioned rolltop desk, the battered typewriter, and the steel filing cabinet indicated that it was an office. There was even a calendar memo pad, a pen-and-pencil set, and an overflowing ashtray on the desk, but any resemblance to any other office stopped right there.

The desktop also held a pair of handcuffs, half a dozen billiard balls, a shiny nickel-plated revolver, one celluloid egg, several decks of playing cards, a bright-green-silk handkerchief, and a stack of unopened mail. In one corner of the room stood a large, galvanized-iron milk can with a straitjacket lying on its top. A feathered devil mask from the Upper Congo leered down from the wall above and

© 1948 by Mrs. Clayton Rawson. Reprinted by permission of Curtis Brown Ltd.

the entire opposite wall was papered with a Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey twenty-four-sheet poster.

A loose-jointed dummy figure of a small boy with pop eyes and violently red hair lay on the filing cabinet together with a skull and a fishbowl filled with paper flowers. And in the cabinet's bottom drawer, which was partly open and lined with paper, there was one half eaten carrot and a twinkly nosed live white rabbit.

A pile of magazines, topped by a French journal, *l'Illusioniste*, was stacked precariously on a chair, and a large bookcase tried vainly to hold an even larger flood of books that overflowed and formed dusty stalagmites growing up from the floor—books whose authors would have been startled at the company they kept. Shaw's *St. Joan* was sandwiched between Rowan's *Story of the Secret Service* and the *Memoirs of Robert Houdin*. Arthur Machen, Dr. Hans Gross, William Blake, Sir James Jeans, Rebecca West, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Ernest Hemingway were bounded on either side by Devol's *Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi* and Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*.

The merchandise in the shop beyond the office had a similar surrealist quality, but the inscription on the glass of the outer door, although equally strange, did manage to supply an explanation. It read: *Miracles For Sale*—THE MAGIC SHOP—A. Merlini, Prop.

And that gentleman, naturally, was just as unusual as his place of business. For one thing, he hadn't put a foot in it, to my knowledge, in at least a week. When he finally did reappear, I found him at the desk sleepily and somewhat glumly eyeing the unopened mail.

He greeted me as though he hadn't seen another human being in at least a month, and the swivel chair creaked as he settled back in it, put his long legs up on the desk, and yawned. Then he indicated the card bearing his business slogan—NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE—which was tacked on the wall.

"I may have to take that sign down," he said lazily. "I've just met a theatrical producer, a scene designer, and a playwright, all of whom are quite impossible. They came in here a week before opening night and asked me to supply several small items mentioned in the script. In one scene a character said, 'Begone!' and the stage directions read: 'The genie and his six dancing-girl slaves vanish instantly.' Later an elephant, complete with howdah and princess, disappeared the same way. I had to figure out how to manage all that and cook up a few assorted miracles for the big scene in heaven, too. Then I spent thirty-six hours in bed. And I'm still half asleep."

He grinned wryly and added, "Ross, if you want anything that isn't a stock item, you can whistle for it."

"I don't want a miracle," I said. "Just an interview. What do you know about ESP and PK?"

"Too much," he said. "You're doing another magazine article?"

"Yes. And I've spent the last week with a queer assortment of characters, too—half a dozen psychologists, some professional gamblers, a nuclear physicist, the secretary of the Psychical Research Society, and a neurologist. I've got an appointment in half an hour with a millionaire, and after that I want to hear what you think of it."

"You interviewed Dr. Rhine at Duke University, of course?"

I nodded. "Sure. He started it all. He says he's proved conclusively that there really are such things as telepathy, mind-reading, clairvoyance, X-ray vision, and probably crystal-gazing as well. He wraps it all up in one package and calls it ESP—meaning Extra-Sensory Perception."

"That," Merlini said, "is not the half of it. His psychokinesis, or PK for short, is positively miraculous—and frightening." The magician pulled several issues of the *Journal of Parapsychology* from the stack of magazines and upset the whole pile. "If the conclusions Rhine has published here are correct—if there really is a tangible mental force that can not only reach out and influence the movements of dice but exert its mysterious control over other physical objects as well—then he has completely upset the applecart of modern psychology and punctured a whole library of general scientific theory as well."

"He's already upset me," I said. "I tried to use PK in a crap game Saturday night. I lost sixty-eight bucks."

My skepticism didn't disturb Merlini. He went right on, gloomier than ever, "If Rhine is right, his ESP and PK have reopened the Pandora's box in which science thought it had forever sealed voodoo and witchcraft and enough other practices of primitive magic to make your hair stand on end. And you're growling about losing a few dollars."

Behind me a hearty, familiar voice said, "I haven't got anything to worry about except a homicidal maniac who has killed three people in the last two days and left absolutely no clues. But can I come in?"

Inspector Homer Gavigan of the New York City Police Department stood in the doorway, his blue eyes twinkling frostily.

Merlini, liking the Cassandra role he was playing, said, "Sure. I've been waiting for you. But don't think that PK won't give you a splitting headache, too. All a murderer would have to do to commit the perfect crime—and a locked-room one at that—would be to exert his psychokinetic mental force from a distance against the trigger of a gun." He pointed a finger at the revolver on the desk. "Like this—"

Gavigan and I both saw the trigger, with no finger on it, move.

Bang!

The gun's report was like a thunderclap in the small room. I knew well enough that it was only a stage prop and the cartridge a blank, but I jumped a foot. So did Gavigan.

"Look, damn it!" the Inspector exploded. "How did you—"

The Great Merlini grinned. He was fully awake now and enjoying himself hugely. "No," he said, "that wasn't PK, luckily. Just ordinary run-of-the-mill conjuring. The Rising Cards and the Talking Skull are both sometimes operated the same way. You can have the secret at the usual catalog price of—"

Like most policemen, Gavigan had a healthy respect for firearms and he was still jumpy. "I don't want to buy either of them," he growled. "Do we have a date for dinner or don't we? I'm starved."

"We do," Merlini said, pulling his long, lean self up out of the chair and reaching for his coat. "Can you join us, Ross?"

I shook my head. "Not this time—I've got a date just now with Andrew Drake."

In the elevator, Merlini gave me an odd look and asked, "Andrew Drake? What has he got to do with ESP and PK?"

"What doesn't he have something to do with?" I replied. "Six months ago it was the Drake Plan To Outlaw War—he tried to take over the U.N. singlehanded. Two months ago, he announced he was setting up a fifteen-million-dollar research foundation to find a cancer cure in six months. 'Polish it off like we did the atom bomb,' he says. 'Put in enough money and you can accomplish anything.' Now he's head over heels in ESP with some yogi mixed in. 'Unleash the power of the human mind and solve all our problems.' Just like that."

"So that's what he's up to," Merlini said as we came out onto Forty-second Street, half a block from Times Square, to face a bitterly cold January wind. "I wondered."

Then, as he followed Gavigan into the official car that waited and left me shivering on the curb, he threw a last cryptic sentence over

his shoulder. "When Drake mentions Rosa Rhys," he said, "you might warn him that he's heading for trouble."

Merlini didn't know how right he was. If any of us had had any clairvoyant ability at all, I wouldn't have taken a cab up to Drake's—all three of us would have gone, in Gavigan's car and with the siren going full blast.

As it was, I stepped out all alone in front of the big Ninety-eighth Street house just off Riverside Drive. It was a sixty-year-old mansion built in the tortured style that had been the height of architectural fashion in the 'eighties but was now a smoke-blackened monstrosity as coldly depressing as the weather.

I nearly froze both ears just getting across the pavement and up the steps, where I found a doctor with his finger glued—or frozen, perhaps—to the bell push. A doctor? No, it wasn't ESP—a copy of the *A.M.A. Journal* stuck out of his overcoat pocket and his left hand carried the customary small black case. But he didn't have the medical man's usual clinical detachment. This doctor was jumpy as hell.

When I asked, "Anything wrong?" his head jerked around and his pale-blue eyes gave me a startled look. He was a thin, well dressed man in his early forties.

"Yes," he said crisply, "I'm afraid so." He jabbed a long forefinger at the bell again just as the door opened.

At first I didn't recognize the girl who looked out at us. When I saw her by daylight earlier in the week I had tagged her as in the brainy-but-a-bit-plain category, a judgment I revised somewhat now, considering what the Charles hairdo and Hattie Carnegie dress did for her.

"Oh, hello, Doctor," she said. "Come in."

The doctor began talking even before he crossed the threshold. "Your father, Elinor—is he still in the study?"

"Yes, I think so. But what—"

She stopped because he was already gone, running down the hall toward a door at its end. He rattled the doorknob, then rapped loudly. "Mr. Drake! Let me in!"

The girl looked puzzled, then frightened. Her dark eyes met mine for an instant and then her high heels clicked on the polished floor as she, too, ran down the hall. I didn't wait to be invited. I followed.

The doctor's knuckles rapped again on the door. "Miss Rhys!" he called. "It's Dr. Garrett! Unlock the door!"

There was no answer.

Garrett tried the doorknob once more, then threw his shoulder against the door. It didn't move.

"Elinor, do you have a key? We must get in there—quickly!"

She said, "No. Father has the only keys. Why don't they answer? What's wrong?"

"I don't know," Garrett said. "Your father phoned me just now. He was in pain. He said, '*Hurry! I need you. I'm—*'" The doctor hesitated, watching the girl, then he finished "*—dying.*" After that—no answer." Garrett turned to me. "You've got more weight than I have. Think you can break this door in?"

I looked at it. The door seemed solid enough, but it was an old house and the wood around the screws that held the lock might give. "I don't know," I said. "I'll try."

Elinor Drake moved to one side and the doctor stepped behind me. I threw myself against the door twice and the second time I felt it move a bit. Then I hit it hard. Just as the door gave way I heard the tearing sound of paper.

But before I could discover what caused that, my attention was held by more urgent matters. I found myself staring at a green-shaded desk lamp, the room's only source of light, at the overturned phone on the desktop, and at the sprawled shape that lay on the floor in front of the desk. A coppery highlight glinted on a letter opener near the man's feet. Its blade was discolored with a dark wet stain.

Dr. Garrett said, "Elinor, you stay out," as he moved past me to the body and bent over it. One of his hands lifted Andrew Drake's right eyelid, the other felt his wrist.

I have never heard a ghost speak, but the sound that came then was exactly what I would expect—a low, quivering moan shot with pain. I jerked around and saw a glimmer of white move in the darkness on my left.

Behind me, Elinor's whisper, a tense thread of sound, said, "Lights," as she clicked the switch by the door. The glow from the ceiling fixture overhead banished both the darkness and the specter—but what remained was almost as unlikely. A chair lay overturned on the carpet next to a small table that stood in the center of the room. In a second chair, slumped forward with her head resting on the tabletop, was the body of a young woman.

She was young, dark-haired, rather good-looking, and had an excellent figure. This latter fact was instantly apparent because—and

I had to look twice before I could believe what I saw—she wore a brief, skin-tight, one-piece bathing suit. Nothing else.

Elinor's eyes were still on the sprawled shape on the floor. "Father. He's—dead?"

Garrett nodded slowly and stood up.

I heard the quick intake of her breath, but she made no other sound. Then Garrett strode quickly across to the woman at the table.

"Unconscious," he said after a moment. "Apparently a blow on the head—but she's beginning to come out of it." He looked again at the knife on the floor. "We'll have to call the police."

I hardly heard him. I was wondering why the room was so bare. The hall outside and the living room that opened off it were furnished with the stiff, formal ostentation of the overly rich. But Drake's study, by contrast, was as sparsely furnished as a cell in a Trappist monastery. Except for the desk, the small table, the two chairs, and a three-leaf folding screen that stood in one corner, it contained no other furniture. There were no pictures on the walls, no papers, and, although there were shelves for them, no books. There wasn't even a blotter or pen on the desktop. Nothing but the phone, desk lamp—and, strangely enough, a roll of gummed paper tape.

But I only glanced at these things briefly. It was the large casement window in the wall behind the desk that held my attention—a dark rectangle beyond which, like a scattered handful of bright jewels, were the lights of Jersey and, above them, frosty pinpoints of stars shining coldly in a black sky.

The odd thing was that the window's center line, where its two halves joined, was crisscrossed by two-foot strips of brown-paper tape pasted to the glass. The window was, quite literally, sealed shut. It was then that I remembered the sound of tearing paper as the lock had given way and the door had come open.

I turned. Elinor still stood there—motionless. And on the inside of the door and on the jamb were more of the paper strips. Four were torn in half. Two others had been pulled loose from the wall and hung curled from the door's edge.

At that moment a brisk, energetic voice came from the hall. "How come you leave the front door standing wide open on the coldest day in—"

Elinor turned to face a broad-shouldered young man with wavy hair, hand-painted tie, and a completely self-assured manner. She said, "Paul," then took one stumbling step and was in his arms.

He blinked at her. "Hey! What's wrong?" Then he saw what lay on the floor by the desk. His self-confidence sagged.

Dr. Garrett moved to the door. "Kendrick," he said, "take Elinor out of here. I'll—"

"No!" It was Elinor's voice. She straightened up, turned suddenly, and started into the room.

But Paul caught her. "Where are you going?"

She tried to pull away from him. "I'm going to phone the police." Her eyes followed the trail of bloodstains that led from the body across the beige carpet to the overturned chair and the woman at the table. "She—killed him."

That was when I started for the phone myself. But I hadn't taken more than two steps when the woman in the bathing suit let out a hair-raising shriek.

She was gripping the table with both hands, her eyes fixed on Drake's body with the rigid, unblinking stare of a figure carved from stone. Then, suddenly, her body trembled all over and she opened her mouth again—but Garrett got there first.

He slapped her on the side of the face—hard.

It stopped the scream, but the horror still filled her dark eyes and she stared at the body as though it were some demon straight from hell.

"Hysteria," Garrett said. Then, seeing me start again toward the phone, "Get an ambulance, too." And when he spoke to Paul Kendrick this time, it was an order. "And get Elinor out of here—quickly."

Elinor Drake was looking at the girl in the bathing suit with wide, puzzled eyes. "She—she killed him. Why?"

Paul nodded. He turned Elinor around gently but swiftly and led her out.

The cops usually find too many fingerprints on a phone, none of them any good because they're superimposed on each other. But I handled the receiver carefully just the same, picking it up by one end. When Spring 7-1313 answered, I gave the operator the facts fast, then asked him to locate Inspector Gavigan and have him call me back. I gave Drake's number.

As I talked, I watched Dr. Garrett open his black case and take out a hypodermic syringe. He started to apply it to the woman's arm just as I hung up.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Sedative. Otherwise she'll be screaming again in a minute."

The girl didn't seem to feel the needle as it went in.

Then, noticing two bright spots of color on the table, I went across to examine them closely and felt more than ever as though I had stepped straight into a surrealist painting. I was looking at two rounded conical shapes, each about two inches in length. Both were striped like candy canes, one in maroon against a white background, the other in thinner brilliant red stripes against an opalescent amber.

"Did Drake," I asked, "collect seashells, too?"

"No." Garrett scowled in a worried way at the shells. "But I once did. These are mollusks, but not from the sea. *Cochlostyla*, a tree snail. Habitat the Philippines." He turned his scowl from the shells to me. "By the way, just who are you?"

"The name is Ross Harte." I added that I had had an appointment to interview Drake for a magazine article and then asked, "Why is this room sealed as it is? Why is this girl dressed only in—"

Apparently, like many medical men, Garrett took a dim view of reporters. "I'll make my statement," he said a bit stiffly, "to the police."

They arrived a moment later. Two uniformed prowler-cops first, then the precinct boys, and after that, at intervals, the homicide squad, an ambulance intern, a fingerprint man and photographer, the medical examiner, an assistant D.A., and, later, because a millionaire rates more attention than the victim of a Harlem stabbing, the D.A. himself. And an Assistant Chief Inspector even looked in for a few minutes.

Of the earlier arrivals, the only familiar face was that of the homicide squad's Lieutenant Doran—a hard-boiled, coldly efficient, no-nonsense cop who had so little use for reporters that I suspected he had once been bitten by one.

At Dr. Garrett's suggestion, which the intern seconded, the girl in the bathing suit was taken under guard to the nearest hospital. Then Garrett and I were put on ice, also under guard, in the living room.

Another detective ushered Paul Kendrick into the room a moment later. He scowled at Dr. Garrett. "We all thought Rosa Rhys was bad medicine. But I never expected anything like this. Why would *she* want to kill him? It doesn't make sense."

"Self-defense?" I suggested. "Could he have made a pass at her and—"

Kendrick shook his head emphatically. "Not that gal. She was making a fast play for the old man—and his money. A pass would have been just what she wanted." He turned to Garrett. "What were they doing in there—more ESP experiments?"

The doctor laid his overcoat neatly over the back of an ornate Spanish chair. His voice sounded tired and defeated. "No. They had gone beyond that. I told him that she was a fraud, but you know how Drake was—always so absolutely confident that he couldn't be wrong about anything. He said he'd put her through a test that would convince all of us."

"Of what?" I asked. "What was it she claimed she could do?"

The detective at the door moved forward. "My orders," he said, "are that you're not to talk about what happened until after the Lieutenant has taken your statements. Make it easy for me, will you?"

That made it difficult for us. Any other conversational subject just then seemed pointless. We sat there silent and uncomfortable. But somehow the nervous tension that had been in our voices was still there—a foreboding, ghostly presence waiting with us for what was to happen next.

A half hour later, although it seemed many times that long, Garrett was taken out for questioning, then Kendrick. And later I got the nod. I saw Elinor Drake, a small, lonely figure in the big hall, moving slowly up the wide stairs. Doran and the police stenographer who waited for me in the stately dining room with its heavy crystal chandelier looked out of place. But the Lieutenant didn't feel ill at ease—his questions were as businesslike and as coldly efficient as a surgeon's knife.

I tried to insert a query of my own now and then, but soon gave that up. Doran ignored all such attempts as completely as if they didn't exist. Then, just as he dismissed me, the phone rang. Doran answered, listened, scowled, and then held the receiver out to me. "For you," he said.

I heard Merlini's voice. "My ESP isn't working so well today, Ross. Drake is dead. I get that much. But just what happened up there, anyway?"

"ESP, my eye," I told him. "If you were a mindreader you'd have been up here long ago. It's a sealed room—in spades. The sealed room to end all sealed rooms."

I saw Doran start forward as if to object. "Merlini," I said quickly,

"is Inspector Gavigan still with you?" I lifted the receiver from my ear and let Doran hear the "Yes" that came back.

Merlini's voice went on. "Did you say sealed room? The flash from headquarters didn't mention that. They said an arrest had already been made. It sounded like a routine case."

"Headquarters," I replied, "has no imagination. Or else Doran has been keeping things from them. It isn't even a routine sealed room. Listen: a woman comes to Drake's house on the coldest January day since 'eighteen twelve dressed only in a bathing suit. She goes with him into his study. They seal the window and door on the inside with gummed paper tape. Then she stabs him with a paper knife. Before he dies, he knocks her out, then manages to get to the phone and send out an S.O.S.

"She's obviously crazy—she has to be to commit murder under those circumstances. But Drake wasn't crazy. A bit eccentric, maybe, but not nuts. So why would he lock himself in so carefully with a homicidal maniac? If headquarters thinks that's routine, I'll—" Then I interrupted myself—there was too much silence on the other end of the wire. "Merlini! Are you still there?"

"Yes," he said slowly, "I'm still here. Headquarters was much too brief. They didn't tell us her name. But I know it now."

Then, abruptly, I felt as if I had stepped off into some fourth-dimensional hole in space and had dropped instantly onto some other nightmare planet.

Merlini's voice, completely serious, was saying, "Ross, did the police find a silver denarius from the time of the Caesars in that room? Or a freshly picked rose, a string of Buddhist prayer beads—perhaps a bit of damp seaweed?"

I didn't say anything. I couldn't.

After a moment, Merlini added, "So they did. What was it?"

"Shells," I said dazedly, still unconvinced that any conversation could sound like this. "Philippine tree snail shells. Why, in the name of—"

Merlini cut in hastily, "Tell Doran that Gavigan and I will be there in ten minutes! Sit tight and keep your eyes open!"

"Merlini!" I objected frantically, "if you hang up without—"

"The shells explain the bathing suit, Ross—and make it clear why the room was sealed. But they also introduce an element that Gavigan and Doran and the D.A. and the Commissioner are not going to like at all. I don't like it myself. It's even more frightening as a murder method than PK."

He hesitated a moment, then let me have both barrels. "Those shells suggest that Drake's death might have been caused by even stranger forces—evil and evanescent ones—from another world!"

My acquaintance with a police inspector cut no ice with Doran—he ordered me right back into the living room.

I heard a siren announce the arrival of Gavigan's car shortly after, but it was a long hour later before Doran came in and said, "The Inspector wants to see all of you—in the study."

As I moved with the others out into the hall, I saw Merlini waiting for me. "It's about time," I growled at him. "Another ten minutes and you'd have found me D.O.A., too—from suspense."

"Sorry you had to cool your heels," he said, "but Gavigan is being difficult. As predicted, he doesn't like the earful Doran has been giving him. Neither do I." The drily ironic good humor that was almost always in his voice was absent. He was unusually sober.

"Don't build it up," I said. "I've had all the mystery I can stand. Just give me answers. First, why did you tell me to warn Drake about Rosa Rhys?"

"I didn't expect murder, if that's what you're thinking," he replied. "Drake was elaborating on some of Rhine's original experiments aimed at discovering whether ESP operates more efficiently when the subject is in a trance state. Rosa is a medium."

"Oh, so that's it. She and Drake were holding a seance?"

Merlini nodded. "Yes. The Psychical Research Society is extremely interested in ESP and PK—it's given them a new lease on life. And I knew they had recommended Rosa, whom they had previously investigated, to Drake."

"And what about the Roman coins, roses, Buddhist prayer beads—and snail shells? Why the bathing suit and how does that explain why the room was sealed?"

But Doran, holding the study door open, interrupted before he could reply. "Hurry it up!" he ordered.

Going into that room now was like walking onto a brightly lighted stage. A powerful electric bulb of almost floodlight brilliance had been inserted in the ceiling fixture and its harsh white glare made the room more barren and cell-like than ever. Even Inspector Gavigan seemed to have taken on a menacing air. Perhaps it was the black mask of shadow that his hat brim threw down across the upper part of his face, or it may have been the carefully intent way he watched us as we came in.

Doran did the introductions. "Miss Drake, Miss Potter, Paul Kendrick, Dr. Walter Garrett."

I looked at the middle-aged woman whose gayly frilled, altogether feminine hat contrasted oddly with her angular figure, her prim, determined mouth, and the chilly glance of complete disapproval with which she regarded Gavigan.

"How," I whispered to Merlini, "did Isabelle Potter, the secretary of the Psychical Research Society, get here?"

"She came with Rosa," he answered. "The police found her upstairs reading a copy of Tyrrell's *Study of Apparitions*." Merlini smiled faintly. "She and Doran don't get along at all."

"They wouldn't," I said. "They talk different languages. When I interviewed her, I got a travelogue on the other world—complete with lantern slides."

Inspector Gavigan wasted no time. "Miss Drake," he began, "I understand the medical foundation for cancer research your father thought of endowing was originally your idea."

The girl glanced once at the stains on the carpet, then kept her dark eyes steadily on Gavigan. "Yes," she said slowly, "it was."

"Are you interested in psychical research?"

Elinor frowned. "No."

"Did you object when your father began holding seances with Miss Rhys?"

She shook her head. "That would only have made him more determined."

Gavigan turned to Kendrick. "Did you?"

"Me?" Paul lifted his brows. "I didn't know him well enough for that. Don't think he liked me much, anyway. But why a man like Drake would waste his time—"

"And you, Doctor?"

"Did I object?" Garrett seemed surprised. "Naturally. No one but a neurotic, middle-aged woman would take a seance seriously."

Miss Potter resented that one. "Dr. Garrett," she said icily, "Sir Oliver Lodge was not a neurotic woman, nor Sir William Crookes, nor Professor Zöllner, nor—"

"But they were all senile," Garrett replied just as icily. "And as for ESP, no neurologist of any standing admits any such possibility. They leave such things to you and your society, Miss Potter—and to the Sunday supplements."

She gave the doctor a look that would have split an atom, and Gavigan, seeing the danger of a chain reaction if this sort of dialogue

were allowed to continue, broke in quickly. "Miss Potter. You introduced Miss Rhys to Mr. Drake and he was conducting ESP experiments with her. Is that correct?"

Miss Potter's voice was still dangerously radioactive. "It is. And their results were most gratifying and important. Of course, neither you nor Dr. Garrett would understand—"

"And then," Garrett cut in, "they both led him on into an investigation of Miss Rhys's psychic specialty—apports." He pronounced the last word with extreme distaste.

Inspector Gavigan scowled, glanced at Merlini, and the latter promptly produced a definition. "An apport," he said, "from the French *apporter*, to bring, is any physical object supernormally brought into a seance room—from nowhere usually or from some impossible distance. Miss Rhys on previous occasions—according to the Psychical Society's *Journal*—has apported such objects as Roman coins, roses, beads, and seaweed."

"She is the greatest apport medium," Miss Potter declared somewhat belligerently, "since Charles Bailey."

"Then she's good," Merlini said. "Bailey was an apport medium Conan Doyle considered bona fide. He produced birds, oriental plants, small animals, and on one occasion a young shark eighteen inches long which he claimed his spirit guide had whisked instantly via the astral plane from the Indian Ocean and projected, still damp and very much alive, into the seance room."

"So," I said, "that's why this room was sealed. To make absolutely certain that no one could open the door or window in the dark and help Rosa by introducing—"

"Of course," Garrett added. "Obviously there could be no apports if adequate precautions were taken. Drake also moved a lot of his things out of the study and inventoried every object that remained. He also suggested, since I was so skeptical, that I be the one to make certain that Miss Rhys carried nothing into the room on her person. I gave her a most complete physical examination—in a bedroom upstairs. Then she put on one of Miss Drake's bathing suits."

"Did you come down to the study with her and Drake?" Gavigan asked.

The doctor frowned. "No. I had objected to Miss Potter's presence at the seance and Miss Rhys countered by objecting to mine."

"She was quite right," Miss Potter said. "The presence of an unbeliever like yourself would prevent even the strongest psychic forces from making themselves manifest."

"I have no doubt of that," Garrett replied stiffly. "It's the usual excuse, as I told Drake. He tried to get her to let me attend but she refused flatly. So I went back to my office down the street. Drake's phone call came a half hour or so later."

"And yet—" Gavigan eyed the two brightly colored shells on the table "—in spite of all your precautions, she produced two of these."

Garrett nodded. "Yes, I know. But the answer is fairly obvious now. She hid them somewhere in the hall outside on her arrival and then secretly picked them up again on her way in here. It's the only thing she could have done."

Elinor frowned. "I'm afraid not, Doctor. Father thought of that and asked me to go down with them to the study. He held one of her hands and I held the other."

Gavigan scowled. Miss Potter beamed.

"Did you go in with them?" Merlini asked.

She shook her head. "No. Only as far as the door. They went in and I heard it lock behind them. I stood there for a moment or two and heard Father begin pasting the tape on the door. Then I went back to my room to dress. I was expecting Paul."

Inspector Gavigan turned to Miss Potter. "You remained upstairs the whole time?"

"Yes," she replied in a tone that dared him to deny it, "I did."

Gavigan looked at Elinor. "Paul said a moment ago that your father didn't like him. Why not?"

"Paul exaggerates," the girl said quickly. "Father didn't dislike him. He was just—well, a bit difficult where my men friends were concerned."

"He thought they were all after his money," Kendrick added. "But at the rate he was endowing medical foundations and psychic societies—"

Miss Potter objected. "Mr. Drake did *not* endow the Psychic Society, young man."

"But he was seriously considering it," Garrett said. "Miss Rhys—and Miss Potter—were selling him on the theory that illness is only a mental state due to a psychic imbalance—whatever that is."

"They won't sell me on that," Elinor said and then turned suddenly on Miss Potter, her voice trembling. "If it weren't for you and your idiotic foolishness, Father wouldn't have been killed." Then to Gavigan, "We've told all this before—to the Lieutenant. Is it quite necessary?"

The Inspector glanced at Merlini, then said, "I think that will be

all for now. Okay, Doran, take them back. But none of them is to leave the house just yet."

When they had gone, he turned to Merlini. "Well, I asked the questions you wanted me to, but I still think it was a waste of time. Rosa Rhys killed Drake. Anything else is utterly impossible."

"What about Kendrick's cab driver?" Merlini asked. "Did your men locate him yet?"

Gavigan's scowl, practically standard operating procedure by now, grew darker. "Yes. Kendrick's definitely out. He entered the cab on the other side of town at just about the time Drake was sealing this room and he was apparently still in it, crossing Central Park, at the time Drake was killed."

"So," I commented, "he's the only one with an alibi."

Gavigan lifted his eyebrows. "The only one? Except for Rosa Rhys they *all* have alibis. The sealed room takes care of that."

"Yes," Merlini said quietly, "but the people with alibis also have motives while the one person who could have killed Drake has none."

"She did it," the Inspector answered. "So she's got a motive—and we'll find it."

"I wish I were as confident of that as you are," Merlini said. "Under the circumstances, you'll be able to get a conviction without showing motive, but if you don't find one it will always bother you."

"Maybe," Gavigan admitted, "but that won't be as bad as trying to believe what she says happened in this room."

That was news to me. "You've talked to Rosa?" I asked.

"One of the boys did," Gavigan said sourly. "At the hospital. She's already preparing an insanity defense."

"But why?" Merlini asked. "Is she still hysterical with fright? Could it be that she's scared because she really believes her story—because something like that really did happen in here?"

"Look," I said impatiently, "is it top secret or will somebody tell me what she says happened?"

Gavigan glowered at Merlini. "Are you going to stand there and tell me that you think Rosa Rhys actually believes—"

It was my question that Merlini answered. He walked to the table in the center of the room. "She says that after Drake sealed the window and door, the lights were turned off and she and Drake sat opposite each other at this table. His back was toward the desk, hers toward that screen in the corner. Drake held her hands. They waited. Finally she felt the psychic forces gathering around her—and then,

out of nowhere, the two shells dropped onto the table one after the other. Drake got up, turned on the desk light, and came back to the table. A moment later it happened."

The magician paused for a moment, regarding the bare, empty room with a frown. "Drake," he continued, "was examining the shells, quite excited and pleased about their appearance, when suddenly, Rosa says, she heard a movement behind her. She saw Drake look up and then stare incredulously over her shoulder." Merlini spread his hands. "And that's all she remembers. Something hit her. When she came to, she found herself staring at the blood on the floor and at Drake's body."

Gavigan was apparently remembering Merlini's demonstration with the gun in his office. "If you," he warned acidly, "so much as try to hint that one of the people outside this room projected some mental force that knocked Rosa out and then caused the knife to stab Drake—"

"You know," Merlini said, "I half expected Miss Potter would suggest that. But her theory is even more disturbing." He looked at me. "She says that the benign spirits Rosa usually evoked were overcome by some malign and evil entity whose astral substance materialized momentarily, killed Drake, then returned to the other world from which it came."

"She's a mental case, too," Gavigan said disgustedly. "They have to be crazy if they expect anyone to believe any such—"

"That," Merlini said quietly, "may be another reason Rosa is scared to death. Perhaps she believes it but knows you won't. In her shoes, I'd be scared, too." He frowned. "The difficulty is the knife."

Gavigan blinked. "The knife? What's difficult about that?"

"If I killed Drake," Merlini replied, "and wanted appearances to suggest that psychic forces were responsible, you wouldn't have found a weapon in this room that made it look as if I were guilty. I would have done a little de-apporting and made it disappear. As it is now, even if the knife was propelled supernaturally, Rosa takes the rap."

"And how," Gavigan demanded, "would you make the knife disappear if you were dressed, as she was, in practically nothing?" Then, with sudden suspicion, he added, "Are you suggesting that there's a way she could have done that—and that you think she's not guilty because she didn't?"

Merlini lifted one of the shells from the table and placed it in the center of his left palm. His right hand covered it for a brief moment,

then moved away. The shell was no longer there; it had vanished as silently and as easily as a ghost. Merlini turned both hands palms outward. Both were unmistakably empty.

"Yes," he said, "she could have made the knife disappear—if she had wanted to. The same way she produced the two shells." He made a reaching gesture with his right hand and the missing shell reappeared suddenly at his fingertips.

Gavigan looked annoyed and relieved at the same time. "So," he said, "you do know how she got those shells in here. I want to hear it. Right now."

But Gavigan had to wait.

At that moment, a torpedo hit the water-tight circumstantial case against Rosa Rhys and detonated with a roar.

Doran, who had answered the phone a moment before, was swearing profusely. He was staring at the receiver he held as though it were a live cobra he had picked up by mistake. "It's Doc Hess," he said in a dazed tone. "He just started the autopsy and thought we'd like to know that the point of the murder knife struck a rib and broke off. He just dug out a triangular pointed piece of steel."

For several seconds after that, there wasn't a sound. Then Merlini spoke.

"Gentlemen of the jury. Exhibit A, the paper knife with which my esteemed opponent, the District Attorney, claims Rosa Rhys stabbed Andrew Drake, is a copper alloy—and its point, as you can see, is quite intact. The defense rests."

Doran swore again. "Drake's inventory lists that letter opener, but that's all. There is no other knife in this room. I'm positive of that."

Gavigan jabbed a thick forefinger at me. "Ross, Dr. Garrett was in here before the police arrived. And Miss Drake and Kendrick."

I shook my head. "Sorry. There was no knife near the door and neither Elinor nor Paul came more than a foot into the room. Dr. Garrett examined Drake and Rosa, but I was watching him, and I'll testify that unless he's as expert at sleight-of-hand as Merlini he didn't pick up a thing."

Doran was not convinced. "Look, buddy—unless Doc Hess has gone crazy, too, there was a knife and it's not here now. So somebody took it out." He turned to the detective who stood at the door. "Tom," he said, "have the boys frisk all those people. Get a policewoman for Miss Drake and Potter and search the bedroom where they've been waiting. The living room, too."

Then I had a brainstorm. "You know," I said, "if Elinor is covering up for someone—if three people came in here for the seance instead of two, as she says—the third could have killed Drake and then gone out with the knife. And the paper tape could have been—" I stopped.

"—pasted on the door *after* the murderer left?" Merlini finished. "By Rosa? That would mean she framed herself."

"Besides," Gavigan growled, "the boys fumed all those paper strips. There are fingerprints all over them. All Drake's."

Merlini said, "Doran, I suggest that you phone the hospital and have Rosa searched, too."

The Lieutenant blinked. "But she was practically naked. How in blazes could she carry a knife out of here unnoticed?"

Gavigan faced Merlini, scowling. "What did you mean when you said a moment ago that she could have got rid of the knife the same way she produced those shells?"

"If it was a clasp knife," Merlini explained. "She could have used the same method other apport mediums have employed to conceal small objects under test conditions."

"But damn it," Doran exploded, "the only place Garrett didn't look was in her stomach!"

Merlini grinned. "I know. That was his error. Rosa is a regurgitating medium—like Helen Duncan, in whose stomach the English investigator, Harry Price, found a hidden ghost—a balled-up length of cheesecloth fastened with a safety pin which showed up when he X-rayed her. X-rays of Rosa seem indicated, too. And search her hospital room and the ambulance that took her over."

Doran looked at Merlini as if the magician were a circus freak with two heads. But Gavigan had heard Merlini talk like this before. "Okay, Doran," he ordered. "Do it."

I saw an objection. "Now *you've* got Rosa framing herself, too," I said. "If she swallowed the murder knife, why should she put blood on the letter opener? That makes no sense at all."

"None of this does," Gavigan complained.

"I know," Merlini answered. "One knife was bad. Two are much worse. And although X-rays of Rosa before the seance would have shown shells, I predict they won't show a knife. If they do, then Rosa needs a psychiatric examination as well."

"Don't worry," Gavigan said gloomily. "She'll get one. Her attorney will see to that. And they'll prove she's crazier than a bedbug without half trying. But if that knife isn't in her—" His voice trailed off.

"Then you'll never convict her," Merlini finished.

"If that happens," the Inspector said ominously, "you're going to have to explain where that knife came from, how it really disappeared, and where it is now."

Merlini's view was even gloomier. "It'll be much worse than that. We'll also have an appearing and vanishing murderer to explain—someone who entered a sealed room, killed Drake, put blood on the paper knife to incriminate Rosa, then vanished just as neatly as any of Miss Potter's ghosts—into thin air."

And Merlini's prediction came true.

The X-ray plates didn't show the slightest trace of a knife. And it wasn't in Rosa's hospital room or in the ambulance. Nor on Garrett, Paul, Elinor Drake, Isabelle Potter—nor, as Doran discovered, on myself. The Drake house was a mess by the time the boys got through taking it apart—but no knife with a broken point was found anywhere. And it was shown beyond doubt that there were no trap doors or sliding panels in the study—the door and window were the only exits.

Inspector Gavigan glowered every time the phone rang—the Commissioner had already phoned twice and without mincing words expressed his dissatisfaction with the way things were going. Gavigan passed this on to Lieutenant Doran and he tried to get out from under by dishing it out to the squad, mincing even fewer words.

And Merlini, stretched out in Drake's chair, his heels up on the desktop, his eyes closed, seemed to have gone into a trance.

"Blast it!" Gavigan said. "Rosa Rhys got that knife out of here somehow. She had to! Merlini, are you going to admit that she knows a trick or two you don't?"

The magician didn't answer for a moment. Then he opened one eye. "No," he said slowly, "not just yet." He took his feet off the desk and sat up straight. "You know," he said, "if we don't accept the theory of the murderer from beyond, then Ross must be right, after all. Elinor Drake's statement to the contrary, there must have been a third person in this room when that seance began."

"Okay," Gavigan said, "we'll forget Miss Drake's testimony for the moment. At least that gets him into the room. Then what?"

"I don't know," Merlini said. He took the roll of gummed paper tape from the desk, tore off a two-foot length, crossed the room, and pasted it across the door and jamb, sealing us in. "Suppose I'm the

killer," he said. "I knock Rosa out first, then stab Drake—" He paused.

Gavigan was not enthusiastic. "You put the murder knife in your pocket, not noticing that the point is broken. You put blood on the paper knife to incriminate Rosa. And then—" He waited. "Well, go on."

"Then," Merlini said, "I get out of here." He scowled at the sealed door and at the window. "I've escaped from handcuffs, straitjackets, milk cans filled with water, packing cases that have been nailed shut. I know the methods Houdini used to break out of safes and jail cells. But I feel as he did when a shrewd old turnkey shut him in a cell in Scotland one time and the lock—a type he'd overcome many times before—failed to budge. No matter how he tried or what he did, the bolt wouldn't move. He was sweating blood because he knew that if he failed his laboriously built-up reputation as the Escape King would be blown to bits. And then—" Merlini blinked. "And then—" This time he came to a full stop, staring at the door.

Suddenly he blinked. "Shades of Hermann, Kellar, Thurston, and Houdini! So that's it!"

Grinning broadly, he turned to Gavigan. "We will now pass a miracle and chase all the ghosts back into their tombs. If you'll get those people in here—"

"You know how the vanishing man vanished?" I asked.

"Yes. It's someone who has been just as canny as that Scotch jailer, and I know who."

Gavigan said, "It's about time." Then he walked across the room and pulled the door open, tearing the paper strip in half as he did so.

Merlini, watching him, grinned again. "The method by which magicians let their audiences fool themselves—the simplest and yet most effective principle of deception in the whole book—and it nearly took me in!"

Elinor Drake's eyes still avoided the stains on the floor. Paul, beside her, puffed nervously on a cigarette, and Dr. Garrett looked drawn and tired. But not the irrepressible Potter. She seemed fresh as a daisy. "This room," she said to no one in particular, "will become more famous in psychic annals than the home of the Fox sisters at Lilydale."

Quickly, before she could elaborate on that, Merlini cut in. "Miss Potter doesn't believe that Rosa Rhys killed Drake. Neither do I.

But the psychic force she says is responsible didn't emanate from another world. It was conjured up out of nothing by someone who was—who had to be—here in this room when Drake died. Someone Drake himself asked to be here."

He moved into the center of the room as he spoke and faced them under the bright light. "Drake would never have convinced anyone that Rosa could do what she claimed without a witness. So he gave someone a key—someone who came into this room *before* Drake and Rosa and Elinor came downstairs."

The four people watched him without moving—almost, I thought, without breathing.

"That person hid behind that screen and then, after Rosa produced the apports, knocked her out, killed Drake, and left Rosa to face the music."

Paul Kendrick glanced at the door and the paper strips and scowled, but said nothing.

"All we have to do," Merlini went on, "is show who it was that Drake selected as a witness." He pointed a lean forefinger at Isabelle Potter. "If Drake discovered how Rosa produced the shells and realized she was a fraud, you might have killed him to prevent an exposure and save face for yourself and the Society—and you might then have framed Rosa in revenge for having deceived you. But Drake would never have chosen you. Your testimony wouldn't have convinced any of the others. No. Drake would have picked one of the skeptics—someone he was certain could never be accused of assisting the medium."

He faced Elinor. "You said that you accompanied Rosa and your father to the study door and saw them go in alone. We haven't asked Miss Rhys yet, but I think she'll confirm it. You couldn't expect to lie about that and make it stick as long as Rosa could and would contradict you."

I saw Doran move forward silently, closing in.

"And Paul Kendrick," Merlini went on, "is the only one of you who has an alibi that doesn't depend on the sealed room. That leaves the most skeptical one of the three—the man whose testimony would by far carry the greatest weight.

"It leaves you, Dr. Garrett. The man who is so certain that there are no ghosts is the man who conjured one up."

Merlini played the scene down. He knew that the content of what he said was dramatic enough. But Garrett's voice was even calmer. He shook his head slowly. "I am afraid I can't agree. You have no

reason to assume that it must be one of us and no one else. But I would like to hear how you think I or anyone else could have walked out of this room leaving it sealed as it was found."

"That," Merlini said, "is the simplest answer of all. You walked out, but you didn't leave the room sealed. You see, *it wasn't found that way!*"

I felt as if I were suddenly floating in space.

"But look—" I began.

Merlini ignored me. "The vanishing murderer was a trick. But magic is not, as most people believe, only a matter of gimmicks and trap doors and mirrors. Its real secret lies deeper than a mere deception of the senses. The magician uses a far more important, more basic weapon—the psychological deception of the mind. *Don't believe everything you see* is excellent advice. But there's a better rule: Don't believe everything you *think*."

"Are you trying to tell me," I said incredulously, "that this room wasn't sealed at all? That I just thought it was?"

Merlini kept watching Garrett. "Yes. It's as simple as that. And there was no visual deception at all. It was, like PK, entirely mental. You saw things exactly as they were, but you didn't realize that the visual appearance could be interpreted two ways. Let me ask you a question. When you break into a room the door of which has been sealed with paper tape on the inside, do you find yourself still in a sealed room?"

"No," I said, "of course not. The paper has been torn."

"And if you break into a room that had been sealed but from which someone has *already gone out*, tearing the seals, what then?"

"The paper," I said, "is still torn. The appearance is—"

"—*exactly the same!*" Merlini finished.

He let that soak in a moment, then continued. "When you saw the taped window, and then the torn paper on the door, you made a false assumption—you jumped naturally, but much too quickly, to a wrong conclusion. We all did. We assumed that it was you who had torn the paper—when you broke in. Actually, it was Dr. Garrett who tore the paper—when he went out!"

Garrett's voice was a shade less steady now. "You forget that Andrew Drake phoned me—"

Merlini shook his head. "I'm afraid we only have your own statement for that. You overturned the phone and placed Drake's body near it. Then you walked out, returned to your office, where you got

rid of the knife—probably a surgical instrument you couldn't leave behind because it might have been traced to you."

Doran, hearing this, whispered a rapid order to the detective stationed at the door.

"Then," Merlini continued, "you came back immediately to ring the front doorbell. You said Drake had called you, partly because it was good misdirection—it made it appear that you were elsewhere when he died. But equally important, it gave you the excuse you needed to break in and find the body without delay—*before Rosa Rhys should regain consciousness and see that the room was no longer sealed.*"

I hated to do it. Merlini was so pleased with the neat way he was tying up all the loose ends. But I had to.

"Merlini," I said, "I'm afraid there is one little thing you don't know. When I smashed the door open, I heard the paper tape tear."

I have seldom seen the Great Merlini surprised, but that did it. He couldn't have looked more astonished if lightning had struck him.

"You—you *what?*"

Elinor Drake said, "I heard it, too."

Garrett added, "And I."

It stopped Merlini cold for a moment—but only a moment.

"Then that's more misdirection. It has to be." He hesitated, then suddenly looked at Doran. "Lieutenant, get the doctor's overcoat, will you?"

Garrett spoke to the Inspector. "This is nonsense. What possible reason could I have for—"

"Your motive was a curious one, Doctor," Merlini said. "One that few murderers—" He stopped as he took the overcoat Doran brought in and removed from its pocket the copy of the *A.M.A. Journal* I had noticed there earlier. He started to open it, then lifted an eyebrow at something he saw on the contents listing.

"I see," he said, and then read: "*A Survey of the Uses of Radioactive Tracers in Cancer Research* by Walter M. Garrett, M.D. So that's your special interest?" The magician turned to Elinor Drake. "Who was to head the fifteen-million-dollar foundation for cancer research, Miss Drake?"

The girl didn't need to reply. The answer was in her eyes as she stared at Garrett.

Merlini went on. "You were hidden behind the screen in the corner, Doctor. And Rosa Rhys, in spite of all the precautions, suc-

cessfully produced the apports. You saw the effect that had on Drake, knew Rosa had won, and that Drake was thoroughly hooked. And the thought of seeing all that money wasted on psychical research when it could be put to so much better use in really important medical research made you boil. Any medical man would hate to see that happen—and most of the rest of us, too.

"But we don't all have the coldly rational, scientific attitude you do, and we wouldn't all have realized so quickly that there was one very simple but drastic way to prevent it—murder. You are much too rational. You believe that one man's life is less important than the good his death might bring—and you believed that sufficiently to act upon it. The knife was there, all too handy, in your little black case. And so—Drake died. Am I right, Doctor?"

Doran didn't like this as a motive. "He's still a killer," he objected. "And he tried to frame Rosa, didn't he?"

Merlini said, "Do you want to answer that, Doctor?"

Garrett hesitated, then glanced at the magazine Merlini still held. His voice was tired. "You are also much too rational." He turned to Doran. "Rosa Rhys was a cheap fraud who capitalized on superstition. The world would be a much better place without such people."

"And what about your getting that job as the head of the medical foundation?" Doran was still unconvinced. "I don't suppose that had anything to do with your reasons for killing Drake?"

The doctor made no answer. And I couldn't tell if it was because Doran was right or because he knew that Doran would not believe him.

He turned to Merlini instead. "The fact still remains that the cancer foundation has been made possible. The only difference is that now two men rather than one pay with their lives."

"A completely rational attitude," Merlini said, "does have its advantages if it allows you to contemplate your own death with so little emotion."

Gavigan wasn't as cynical about Garrett's motives as Doran, but his police training objected. "He took the law into his own hands. If everyone did that, we'd all have to go armed for self-protection. Merlini, why did Ross think he heard paper-tearing when he opened that door?"

"He did hear it," Merlini said. Then he turned to me. "Dr. Garrett stood behind you and Miss Drake when you broke in the door, didn't he?"

I nodded. "Yes."

Merlini opened the medical journal and riffled through it. Half a dozen loose pages, their serrated edges showing where they had been torn in half, fluttered to the floor.

Merlini said, "You would have made an excellent magician, Doctor. Your deception was not visual, it was auditory."

"That," Gavigan said, "tears it."

Later I had one further question to ask Merlini.

"You didn't explain how Houdini got out of that Scottish jail—nor how it helped you solve the enigma of the unsealed door."

Merlini lifted an empty hand, plucked a lighted cigarette from thin air, and puffed at it, grinning.

"Houdini made the same false assumption. When he leaned exhaustedly against the cell door, completely baffled by his failure to overcome the lock, the door suddenly swung open and he fell into the corridor. The old Scot, you see, hadn't locked it at all!"



IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions, including change of address, should be sent to Ellery Queen, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, Iowa 51591.

For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send your current mailing label with new address.

MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ CUTLERY: A CUT ABOVE THE REST

The secret behind Regent Scheffield's new Laser 2000's cutlery is the unique machined edge guaranteed to stay super sharp for 25 years — without sharpening! The result is a knife so sharp and durable that it comes with an unmatched guarantee: If a Laser 2000 knife ever dulls, chips, rusts, or breaks during the next 25 years, Regent Sheffield will replace it FREE! Plus, the Laser 2000's blades have a unique nonstick Xylan coating, so slicing even hard vegetables is a snap. And clean-up is a cinch because food doesn't stick to the blades. Unbreakable, dishwasher-safe handles are contoured to fit your hand comfortably. A lovely sleek wood block holds the entire 5 piece set: bread knife, carving knife, cook's knife, utility knife, and paring knife. **\$129.98** (\$7.00) #A1933.

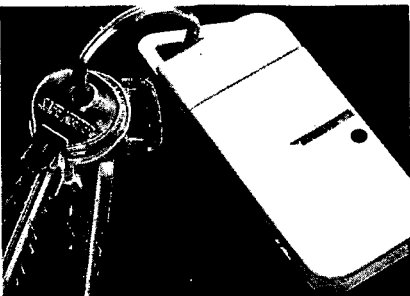


▼ THE MAGICAL SPARE BED

It's almost like pulling an extra bed out of a hat. Unlike most spare beds that gobble up storage space and are unwieldy to move, this one rolls down to fit a 36" long, 3"-diameter canvas case, to stash in a closet corner, car trunk, camper, anywhere. Yet it unrolls in minutes to a full-size 27" x 73" bed that will even accommodate 6-footers, supports up to 500 pounds and is comfortable to boot. The secret's in the inventive construction: a cotton canvas sling is supported on laminated steel legs with 6 steel springs for cushioning and stability on rough ground. Toss the carrying strap over your shoulder and go — camping, beach, poolside; the 10" legs keep it off damp ground and sand. Of course, this bed is indispensable at home, country home, dorm — even for kids in motel rooms. A superb value at **\$61.98** (\$12.25) #A1931.

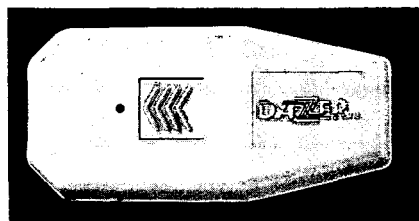


▼ EASY KEY FINDER



Key is misplaced more often than any other modern essential. Now thanks to our easy key finder your keys can tell you where you put them. Clap your hands 4 times and it will chirp electronically. Works up to 30' away. Special hybrid microchip design requires no on/off switch (other units need you to turn them ON before you lose your keys). This unit has a high-impact plastic case; weighs a mere 1/2oz; comes with its own key ring; measures only 2 1/2" x 1 1/8" x 3/8". Batteries and a 30-day manufacturer's warranty are included. **\$13.98** (\$3.00) #A1889; two units, **\$23.98** (\$4.00) #A1890.

▼ HELPFUL TO HUMANS HARMLESS TO DOGS



Even the most dedicated canine aficionado can sometimes encounter unfriendly dogs. Dazer™ provides a humane way to repel their advance, emitting ultrasonic sound waves inaudible to humans and totally safe for dogs (unlike mace and other common deterrents). Pocket size (4 3/4" long) plastic case can also clip on belt; takes 1-9V battery, included. For joggers, hikers, bikers, seniors and kids—plus the proverbial postman. **\$29.98**, (\$3.00) #A1829X.

▼ YES, IT DOES WINDOWS — IN HALF THE TIME

Do we exaggerate? Actually, it may take less than half the time you'd normally spend assembling, toting and juggling bottles or buckets, rags, a hose, a stepstool. Spray & Wipe™ combines in one implement an ample reservoir for your cleaning fluid, a spray trigger at the base and adjustable mist-to-spray head at top, plus a squeegee. At 34" long, it eliminates much climbing; is lightweight but sturdy for firm leverage on the squeegee; swivel head reaches angles. Think patio doors, shower stalls, boats, campers, windshields, et al. **\$15.98** (\$4.00)



#A1865X.

HOW TO ORDER
CALL TOLL FREE, 24 HOURS A DAY,
7 DAYS A WEEK

1-800-365-8493

CUSTOMER SERVICE CALL 201-367-2900

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

**30 Day Money Back Guarantee For
Exchange or Refund**

WE ACCEPT MASTERCARD/VISA

If ordering by mail send remittance to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept.041 EL PO. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701. Item price is followed by shipping and handling in (). Be sure to add both together to arrive at total price. N.J. residents add 6% sales tax. When using credit card — include account number, exp. date, signature. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign or C.O.D. orders.

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. © 1989

1905 Swarthmore Ave, Lakewood, N.J. 08701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a **NEW** short story by

RICHARD MATHESON

Mannix reached across the table by his leather chair, removed a tissue from its dispenser, folded it in quarters, and held it over the mouthpiece. "Hello," he replied.

"Who's this?" asked Inger.

"Don't you know?" he asked. His famous blue-green eyes were crinkling at the corners. He could see them as he had so many times in closeup, on wide-screen, in Technicolor.

An unusual crime for EQMM, and all the more fascinating for that—entrapment, not so pure and simple . . .

CU: MANNIX

by RICHARD MATHESON

While Mannix waited for the receiver to be lifted on the other end of the line, he gazed at the back of his right hand. It was a trim, powerful hand, the skin darkly tanned, the nails immaculately manicured. He spread the fingers and drew them hard into a fist. A good hand, strong and healthy-looking, not a sign of age.

His legs twitched as the intermittent buzzing in the earpiece broke off with a click. "Good afternoon, Renken-Blasker," said the girl's voice.

"Dale Mannix, dear," he told her. "Burt in?"

"Yes, Mr. Mannix—right away." Her tone was properly reverential. Mannix smiled and drew in slowly on his stomach muscles, glancing downward. His chest was spare and nut-brown. Hard, he thought. Who says I'm sixty-two? I'll flatten him.

"What can I do for you, Dale?" Burt Renken's voice inquired.

"Just got a new phone," Mannix told him. "Called to give you the number."

© 1991 by Richard Matheson.

"Shoot," said Renken.

Mannix looked at the receiver. "276-5090," he read.

"Got it," Renken answered. "Old number out the window?"

"No, no—just wanted a second one, exclusively for business." He was briefly, pleasantly conscious of his voice—its warmth and variations.

As he hung up, Mannix stared across the wide expanse of lawn toward the pool. Inger was rubbing tanning lotion over her nude, tawny form. Mannix shivered as she squirted oil drops across her breasts and rubbed them lingeringly into the skin. He thought of going out there in the sun with her. In his imagination, he could feel the soft, hot moistness of her skin.

He made a grumbling sound and picked the script back up. Have to learn these bloody lines, he told himself. He propped the hand-tooled-leather binder on his lap and tried to concentrate. He'd never been too good at reading, though. Not that he didn't have a memory he'd match against the best. No one—but no one—had a better grasp of dialogue than he did. It was the reading itself that bored him. All that damned descriptive garbage.

Mannix crossed his muscular legs and cleared his throat, his eyes on the poolside chaise again. Inger was on her stomach now. She stretched out, resting her head on her arms. What was she thinking of? he wondered. *Who* was she thinking of?

Flexion in his neck again. Trapezius, he thought. He clenched his teeth, visualizing tension spasms in the damaged muscle. He stared out at her naked form. To look inside that golden head, he thought—to see, to *know*.

He glanced at the telephone suddenly, the idea sprung to full bloom in his mind. Smiling, he picked up the receiver and dialed their old number. Fortunately, Maria was out shopping. He started as he heard the jangling of the telephone in the entry hall. To be on both ends of the line at once was an odd sensation. He couldn't hear the poolside telephone.

He smiled as Inger reached out lazily for the receiver. It made him feel godlike to realize that he knew everything and she knew nothing about that ringing telephone beside her.

She lifted the receiver. "Hello?" she said.

That voice—he shivered at the sound of it. Casually, he reached across the table by his leather chair, removed a tissue from its dispenser, folded it in quarters, and held it over the mouthpiece. "Hello," he replied.

"Who's this?" asked Inger.

"Don't you know?" he asked. His famous blue-grey eyes were crinkling at the corners. He could see them as he had so many times—in closeup, on wide-screen, in Technicolor.

"No," she said. Interest or impatience? Mannix lost his smile. He couldn't tell.

"Let's just say a fond admirer."

Inger murmured. "Oh?"

Ice water running up the backs of his legs. It wasn't impatience. "Come on, you know," he said.

"I don't," she protested—mildly.

Mannix turned his head, releasing shaky breath. She knew, he told himself. She was putting him on, that's all. "Sure you do," he insisted. He felt that internationally famous knot of vein at his right temple starting to pulse. "Take a guess."

"How can I?" she asked.

Mannix fumbled on the chairside table, feeling for his eyeglasses. "Try," he said impulsively. "We've met, you know." He realized abruptly that his voice was that of Gresham, the sly Chicago lawyer in *Point of Order*, Universal, 1958. His agent had told him he was crazy to do that one, that it would hurt his image.

"Met where?" she was asking.

"One of those parties," he answered.

He had the glasses now. He slid them hastily across his ears and nose bridge. Inger sprang into focus. "What do you look like?" she asked him.

You'd better know it's me, he thought. The planes of his face were hardened now—that look of threatening anger movie audiences knew the world over: woe betide his enemies now. He looked out coldly at her, his neck beginning to stiffen. "If I told you what I look like," he said, "you'd know who I am and the game would be over."

He covered the mouthpiece, sucked in breath. Hell, let it go, a voice suggested. No, he answered. He'd suspected this for some time now. Let it come out.

"All right," she said, "let's see."

He waited.

"You're—fifty. No, no—sixty," she said.

Mannix grinned. You knew all along, you Kostlich kraut, he thought, delighted. He closed his eyes abruptly, trying not to recognize the surge of gratified relief that filled him. "That old," he heard himself say.

"I'm only teasing," she said.

Mannix opened his eyes.

"You're under forty, I imagine," Inger said.

"That's right." Mannix felt his heartbeat, slow and heavy. "Thirty-eight to be exact." He stared out through the window. Inger had her left arm pressed beneath her breasts, nudging them upward. "That's not old at all," she said.

She *didn't* know. Mannix felt ill. "No, it isn't old," he said with Gresham's voice. "I'm still completely capable of—" (beat): he saw it written on a script page—"quite a bit."

He felt his flesh grow cold as Inger's soft laugh drifted from the eardrum. "I'll bet you are," she said.

Mannix blinked. His head felt light. "I *am*," he told her. "Interested?"

He shuddered as she slid her feet back on the chaise, pushing up her knees. Her legs remained together for an instant, then slumped sideways and apart. "Why should I be interested in you?" she asked.

Mannix felt the pulsing at his temple quicken. Her tone, her posture. *She was willing.*

He twitched as Inger sat up, turned around, and looked back toward the study window. She *did* know! Mannix felt his heartbeat jolt. He waited for her smile, her wave, some sign of recognition. He deserved her mockery for this. He'd take it gracefully and—

Mannix felt himself go numb as Inger turned back and reclined once more. "Well?" she asked.

"Well, what?" She had to recognize his voice now—he wasn't even trying. But he had to try! Abruptly, he was back inside the other man. "Why should you be interested in me? Because I'm good in bed. Damn good." Please, he thought. Please tell me that you know it's me.

"Are you really?" Inger said.

Mannix shivered violently. "If I was there I'd show you."

That laugh again. He'd fought the realization for a long time, but he knew it now: it was an obscene laugh. *Inger* was obscene. "If you were here," she said, "you'd *have* to show me because I'm lying in the sun without a stitch on."

He stared out through the window at her. Now her legs were far apart, her left hand was back behind her head. She's ready for you, Mister, Mannix thought.

The swimming pool reflected like a mirror in the moonlight. Man-

nix stared at it. Bel Air was soundless at this time of night. He heard a bird chirp somewhere in the darkness.

He turned and looked at Inger.

Her body was stretched out on the bed like some sleek, well fed animal. She *is* an animal, he thought. Less than half an hour before she'd straddled him with panting fierceness; "*Kostlich! Kostlich!*" (Delicious! Delicious!) Who had she really straddled in the darkness, though? (She had turned the lamp off, not he.) That man who phoned her this afternoon? He hadn't seen her so excited in a year.

Mannix walked across the carpeting and stood beside the bed, gazed down at the golden flood of hair across the pillow, at her browned, voluptuous figure.

All through dinner he had waited for the laughter. They'd gone over to The Swiss House—she doted on Viennese cooking. They'd gotten one of the tables in back and, as they'd eaten, he'd kept waiting for the laughter to begin—for her to tell him how ridiculous he was. At one point, when he'd seen her smiling to herself, he'd asked her what was funny—felt his hands begin to shake with final, hopeful readiness.

"Nothing," she had said. He'd stared at her and known that everything he'd feared for all these years was true: he was that most despised and ludicrous of men—the cuckold.

Mannix leaned over tremblingly and pulled out the drawer of his bedside table. Reaching in, he drew out his pistol and pointed it at Inger.

No. He shook his head. Ruin his career for her? He smiled contemptuously at her slack, Germanic features. Thirty-seven years he'd been a star. He'd be insane to end that for a moment's dubious revenge. He put the pistol back into the drawer.

He took off his robe and lay down on the bed beside her. Now that he'd made up his mind to divorce her, he was amused at himself for having thought, even for a moment, that she was clever enough to have fooled him.

He clucked. Too bad, he thought. Marriage number four gone down the tube. Amusing that, for the first time, it was not because of *his* unfaithfulness. The public would never believe it, of course. Not that they should—the other enhanced his image better. Mr. Romance. He winced. What idiot columnist had made that up?

It was good all morning. Makeup at six, shooting at seven. The scenes were long and his. There were a lot of takes without excessive

waits for setups. With what spare time there was, he entertained the cast with anecdotes about the Golden Years—memories laced with humor, charm, and wit. He did it beautifully. To lure and hold with words—to be “on” before a rapt, attentive audience—there was nothing like it. It was almost sensual.

Then it was over and he was in his dressing room. Lunch was called. He wasn’t hungry. He sat inside the lavish trailer, staring at the telephone. How long had she been cheating on him? In the almost three years of their marriage, how many times?

Mannix jerked the telephone receiver off its cradle and dialed his home number. As if it were someone else’s hand, he watched it draw the neatly pressed and folded handkerchief from the pocket of his grey slacks and press it down across the mouthpiece. Now what? asked his mind. You’re dumping her. Isn’t that enough?

It’s not, he thought.

“Mannix residence,” said Maria.

Mannix cleared his throat. “Mrs. Mannix, please.”

“One moment,” said Maria.

As he waited, Mannix wondered where she was. She could still be in bed. She liked to sleep late after making love. Love? he thought. He’d never manage to associate that word with her again.

She picked up an extension. “Yes?”

Mannix licked his lips. “Hel-lo,” he said.

“Who’s this?”

“You know who it is,” he answered.

“Do I?”

Mannix tensed. “Sleep well?”

“I always sleep well,” Inger answered.

Yes, you do, he thought—you aren’t bright enough to suffer from anxiety.

She yawned. “Look, I have to go unless—”

Mannix cut her off. “Meet me,” he said. He knew it was absurd, and yet he smiled with mirthless pleasure at the thought.

“Oh, I couldn’t do that,” she protested.

Her coyness made his stomach turn. “Tomorrow,” Mannix told her. He could almost see her. She was sprawled across the bed, still naked.

“What makes you think I want to meet you?” she asked.

“Because you’d love it,” he answered. His fingers clamped in on the bridge of the receiver. “You and me in bed, like animals.”

It was almost anti-climactic when she murmured, “Where?”

The dressing room was blurred around him, swimming. Mannix felt like very heavy, very fragile glass. If he moved, he'd shatter. "Beverly Hills Hotel," he said. It sounded like a first reading. "Three o'clock tomorrow afternoon."

She's going to do it, he thought. He couldn't seem to breathe.

"How will I know you?" Inger asked.

The answer spun immediately to mind. "Just ask for Mr. Smith's room," Mannix said, "Eddie Smith."

"I don't know an Eddie Smith." She sounded suddenly confused.

"Real names tomorrow, baby," Mannix answered.

"Oh, I see," said Inger.

No, you don't, he thought, you don't see anything, you stupid bitch.

"Will it be fun?" she asked. He saw her face quite clearly now.

The edges of her teeth were set together, eager and excited.

Mannix answered, "You have no idea."

He'd yet to take the first sip of his Pimm's Cup. He was sitting in a corner of the Polo Lounge, stirring with its slice of cucumber while he stared at the key on the table. The plastic tag was face up: 315. Eddie Smith's room, Mannix thought. A faint smile drew his lips back. Right, he thought.

Some men walked across the lounge and waved to him. He didn't wave back. He had no desire to talk to anyone. He really should have chosen some more remote spot. Everybody knew him here. Still, what difference did it make? He wasn't here to murder her—just to see a look of stupid bafflement across her face.

Mannix had to smile. It was rather funny, actually—the idea of this Eddie Smith. Mannix saw him as a college football player gone to lard, maybe a small-time actor making out with women who set their standards at the minimum level: any stud in a storm.

Smith could resemble that one over there: broad shoulders, curly blond hair, tight clothes—the jacket a shade too loud, the low-grade silk shirt. Sub-par all the way.

He blinked. The blond young man was smiling at him. Mannix tensed, about to cut him off, when the idea came—instantly complete, completely beautiful. Mannix smiled broadly. How much more satisfying than a look of bafflement on Inger's face. He gestured for the young man to come over.

The young man stood with obvious delight and as he crossed the lounge Mannix realized abruptly that he *was* an actor—he had seen him somewhere in some undistinguished role performed with un-

distinguished flatness. Mannix almost chuckled. The young man would perform all right, he thought; through any indicated hoop. He'd have to—it was part and parcel of his hunger to succeed. They were all the same.

The young man stopped in front of him. "Good afternoon, Mr. Mannix," he said. His smile was that of all young, struggling actors, Mannix thought, straining for unwonted charm—too bright, too many teeth displayed.

"Sit down," Mannix said.

The young man was unable to restrain a startled grin. "Why, *thank you*," he responded. He sat with lithe dispatch. Lifts weights, thought Mannix. Studies at some one-horse acting school, played a few supporting roles in non-pay theater groups, has a list of TV credits adding up to zero. "What's your name?" he asked, his voice genial, interested.

The young man swallowed. "Jeff Cornell," he said sincerely. Who made that up? Mannix wondered. Probably some agent. "Cornell," he tasted. "Seems to me I've seen you somewhere."

"I just did a part on *L.A. Law*," Cornell supplied immediately.

"Of course," said Mannix. He hadn't seen it. "And very good, too," he added, smiling.

"Why, thank you, Mr. Mannix," said Cornell. "That's very kind of you."

Not exactly, Mannix thought. The young man's dazzling smile amused him. Exactly what he needed. "Tell you what I have in mind," he said. "I need a favor."

"I'll do anything I can, Mr. Mannix," Cornell answered gravely.

I know you will, thought Mannix. Anything at all. "I want you to meet my wife at three o'clock," he said. "I want you to seduce her." Not even Olivier could mask a reaction to that, he thought.

It wasn't surprising that Cornell's face went almost completely blank. "Is—?"

"—this a joke?" completed Mannix. "No, it isn't. I have reason to believe that my wife has been unfaithful." With a platoon of different men, the sentence finished in his mind. "I want to divorce her, but I have to have some evidence."

"But—" Cornell looked distressed.

"You have *carte blanche*," continued Mannix, using the tone of whimsical bittersweetness that had endeared him to a generation of moviegoers. "You can go the distance if you want to. I have every

reason to believe she won't object. That part doesn't interest me. My one concern is catching her. You understand?"

He could see that Cornell was trying unsuccessfully to understand.

"Let me give it to you once again," said Mannix. Now his voice had bite. "Number one: I know my wife's been cheating on me. Number two: I need evidence that will stand up in court. Number three: If I can trap her in a compromising state, I'll have that evidence." He leaned back, fingering the key tag. "Not too hard a job," he said. "She won't say no, I guarantee you." He paused for effect. "And, in return," he finished, "you acquire a featured part in my next film which commences shooting this fall in London."

He waited, thinking: I can hear the wheels turn. A featured part in Dale Mannix's next film? London in autumn? *The big chance?*

Jeff Cornell would draw and quarter his mother for less.

Mannix checked his wristwatch. It was only three-nineteen. Come on, he thought. He drank some Scotch and sat the glass down irritably. What were they doing now? He winced. His neck was stiffening again. Disturbances like this were bad for him. He should be home, relaxing in the sun, not sitting here. *God damn her, anyway!*

He looked at his watch again. Seven minutes more. He drew in trembling breath. Play it cool, he told himself. He'd have it made in seven minutes: the delight of seeing Inger's dazed expression and the evidence he'd need to dump her without cost. As for Cornell—He smiled. London in the fall would not see Jeff Cornell before any cameras. Idiot, Mannix thought coldly.

The scene projected on his mind again. Inger entering the hotel at five to three, heading for the desk. Mannix had been standing where she couldn't see him and observed her talking to the clerk, then smiling as she crossed the lobby toward the elevator. Room 315, he thought. He picked the key from the table and dropped it into his pocket. Cool, he thought. He pushed away the glass, then eyed his watch again. Time to go.

Mannix stood. He dropped a five-dollar bill on the table and left the Polo Lounge. Crossing the side lobby, he ascended a half flight of steps and entered the men's room. There he scrubbed and rinsed his hands. I'm washing my hands of her, he thought, the concept pleasing him.

He stared at his reflection as he carefully combed his black and grey-streaked hair. Sixty-two? he thought. Absurd. He didn't look a day past forty-five. He was lean and hard. To hell with Inger. Who

needed her? He was Dale Mannix. He didn't need anyone. He straightened his black knit tie. *Hic jacet*, cunt, he thought, you've had it. Mannix is about to dump you—right into the garbage can where you belong.

The elevator was waiting. He stepped inside and pressed the button. He was Vince DeMaine in *City Heat* going up to kill his faithless wife. No, that was unreality, he thought. This was happening; he was merely getting rid of excess baggage. She could play around on someone else's money. As for him, there were still a lot of numbers in his book.

The doors slid open. Mannix left the elevator, listening to his footsteps. Room 325. He pressed his shoulders back, visualizing himself as he walked: tall, distinguished, on top of the world. Room 323. If Academy Awards were given for true-life performances, he'd win one for the scene he was about to play. 321. He smiled. Let them be naked, he thought. 319. His words were going to hit them with far more impact than bullets. 317. A few more paces.

Mannix stopped outside the room and listened. There was no sound inside. He waited tensely. What were they doing? He reached into his pocket and withdrew the key. Don't let me fumble now! he thought in panic as he almost dropped it. It would be horrible if he unlocked the door so clumsily that she had time to run into the bathroom. They had to be in bed together, naked, staring at him. He would accept no less.

He shoved the key into the lock, twisted it, and pushed the door ajar.

A wave of darkness rushed across him. For a moment, he was certain he was going to faint. His fingers grabbed the doorknob as he wavered.

Jeff Cornell was standing by the window, smoking nervously. Inger was sitting on a chair. Both were dressed. The bed was made. "Do come in," said Inger coldly.

Mannix gaped at her. Her face was pale and rigid, her expression filled with venomous distaste. "Well, are you going to close the door?" she asked. "Or would you rather everyone in the hotel found out about this?"

Mannix pushed the door shut. He felt dazed and numb.

"Disappointed?" Inger asked. "Is your big scene ruined? The outraged husband telling off the guilty wife? Did you rehearse it for a long time?"

Mannix couldn't speak.

"You must think I'm awfully stupid," Inger said.

It hit him then. "You *knew*," he said.

"Brilliant!" she exploded.

"But why—?"

"I have to tell you, don't I?" Inger cut him off. "I really have to tell you—it's impossible for you to understand." She stood up, glaring at him. "I've had it, Dale!" she raged. "Is that clear? Do you understand that? I have *had* it! Years and years of living with your damned suspicions! All right for *you* to have affairs! Oh, yes, of course! *You're* Dale Mannix, you're the big star! Mr. Romance! But *me*? Oh, no, not me! I had to be watched like a criminal! Questioned! Hounded! Constantly suspected! *Well, I've had it, Dale!* This is the last damned straw! Trying to trick me into having an affair with a total stranger so you can trap me with him! You're sick, Dale! *You're sick and you're too damned much for me!*"

Mannix reached out feebly. "Inger." He felt cold and sick. "Inger, please." His neck was like a board.

Inger closed the door and locked it, walked across the room, and sat on the bed. Lying down, she gazed up at the ceiling.

That had been the closest one of all. If Cornell hadn't told her what was going on— She shivered, gooseflesh rising on her arms. All that conversation on the phone and she'd never had the least suspicion it was Dale. She groaned. My God, he could have wrapped me up but good, she thought.

She stretched luxuriantly. It was all right now, though. It had worked out perfectly—she might have planned it herself. Dale wouldn't dare suspect her now. Not for a long time, anyway. She laughed softly. It was a riot that the man he'd picked to trap her had gotten her a long reprieve instead.

Inger sighed. And *what* a man, she thought. She was looking forward to spending time with him. She clenched her teeth and murmured, "*Kostlich*."

She turned her head and looked up at the rows of photographs on the wall. Dale Mannix. The big star. Mr. Romance. She snickered. *Old fool*, she thought.

"Q"

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



**THE BUTLER DID IT?
STAY TUNED...SUBSCRIBE NOW
AND FIND OUT WHODUNIT!**

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

**P.O. Box 7052
Red Oak, IA 51591**

- ☐ Please send me 18 issues of ELLERY
QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE for only
\$26.97—I save 29% off the basic price.
- ☐ Please send me 12 issues for only \$18.97.
I save 25% off the basic price.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

HVSC-3

Please allow 5 to 8 weeks for delivery of first issue. Outside U.S. and possessions \$25.97 for 12 issues
18 issues for \$38.97. All foreign orders must be paid in advance in U.S. currency.

We publish two double issues in March and October.
Each double issue counts as two towards your subscription.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a **NEW Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by**

EDWARD D. HOCH

Dr. Sam knew that Angela was leaving for college the Wednesday after Labor Day, and the evening before her departure he was on his porch when he saw her slip astride her blue bicycle. There were a half dozen others ready to follow—a couple of girls her own age and the usual hangers-on among the younger children.

A brain-teasing new problem for Dr. Sam Hawthorne. Note that with this story Edward D. Hoch has decided to do away with the brief epilogues and prologues that framed the earlier stories in his evocative series . . .

THE PROBLEM OF THE BLUE BICYCLE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It was the late summer of '36 [Dr. Sam Hawthorne recalled] and the presidential-election campaign was heating up. Roosevelt and Landon had been nominated at the conventions back in June, but I hadn't paid much attention at the time because I'd been busy moving into a small house I'd bought for myself just off Main Street. Fourteen years of renting an apartment was enough for me. Even though I wasn't yet married, I wanted a place of my own, and this house was just the size I needed. My nurse, Mary Best, helped me get settled once I was in there, but it took me most of the summer before I began to feel at home.

Often in the evenings and on weekends when I was working around the place, I noticed a girl who lived across the street. There'd been a graduation party the week after I moved in, so I knew she was just out of high school. Her name was Angela Rinaldi and she

© 1991 by Edward D. Hoch.

was tall, dark-haired, and, at least when seen from across the street, attractive. Her friends were a few girls her own age plus a variety of neighborhood children, some a few years younger. I'd see her sometimes in the early evening, when there was still plenty of light, leading them off on their bicycles. She rode a blue bike herself, and usually wore dark-blue slacks that buttoned down each hip.

Angela's mother's name was Cora Rinaldi and when we chatted in the yard one Saturday morning I remember she said, "It's good having a doctor right across the street. We know where to come if we get sick now." She was a woman in her early forties who'd moved to Northmont from New York City because of her husband's job. "He works for the telephone company," she explained. "They're installing a lot of new wiring up this way."

"Rural folks need telephones," I agreed. "I often see your daughter riding her bicycle."

"All the time these days," she agreed with a sigh. "Angela's going off to college in another month. I suppose it's like the end of childhood for her."

These days a high-school graduate would be more interested in boys than bicycles, but back then it was different, especially for a girl like Angela who hadn't been in town that long. She seemed to have plenty of friends, but few of them were boys her own age. I took to watching her on the porch with her girl friends flying down the cement driveway on her bike, leading a charge of other children toward some glorious adventure.

I knew she was leaving for college the Wednesday after Labor Day, and the evening before her departure I was on my porch, relaxing after a difficult day, when I saw her slip astride her blue bicycle. There were a half dozen others ready to follow—a couple of girls her own age and the usual hangers-on among the younger children. One of them was Angela's younger sister. As if this was to be the ride of her life, Angela glided down the driveway in the lead. It had rained earlier in the day, and while the other six stayed on the concrete Angela cut the corner, riding through a large puddle at the edge of the road, her legs straight out to avoid being muddied.

Then they were gone—a girl on the brink of being a woman, leading a ragtag collection of neighborhood children on a final bike ride. I watched them until they disappeared down the road toward the outskirts of town. It would be dark in an hour, but they'd be back by then. I could almost map out their route in my mind: straight out past the Milkin farm, then right along the road to Shinn Corners,

then another right back home. It was a triangular route that would take less than an hour.

The phone rang a little later. It was Mary Best with a question about a bill for one of our patients. "Are you working late again?" I asked her.

"Well, Sam, it's past the first of the month and there are August bills you haven't sent out yet. Where's my salary going to come from if you don't take in any money?"

By the time I got off the phone, it was dark outside and I switched on the lights. I was listening to one of my favorite Tuesday-night radio shows when I heard a car pull up outside. I thought I'd recognized the sound of Sheriff Lens' motor and went out on the porch.

"What's up, Sheriff?"

He'd started across the street toward the Rinaldi home, but when he heard me he came back to the foot of my porch steps. "Hello, Doc. How are you?"

"I'm fine. Are you here on business?"

He nodded. "Maybe you'd better come with me. Something's happened to the Rinaldi girl."

"Angela? What is it?"

"We don't rightly know. She's disappeared."

Lights were burning in all the downstairs rooms of the Rinaldi house. Henry Rinaldi, a good-looking man in his forties with dark hair just beginning to turn grey, answered the doorbell. "Any news?" he asked the sheriff.

"Nothing yet. We have our people and the State Police searching the area. If she doesn't turn up by morning, we'll have fifty people out there searching the fields."

Cora Rinaldi sat on the sofa with a girl I took to be her younger daughter, and I could see her eyes were red from crying. Two older girls, Angela's biking companions, were there. They seemed to relax a bit with Sheriff Lens' statement. Perhaps they'd feared even worse news when he'd arrived at the door.

He turned to the older girls. "I need to know what happened out there. Can you give me your names, first of all? I know you, Laura, but I don't know your friend."

Laura was Laura Fine, whose father was vice president of the bank. I knew the family slightly, but I hadn't recognized her until that moment. The other girl said she was Judy Irving. Both had graduated from high school with Angela, and had often been with her during the summer, biking or riding around in somebody's car.

"Give me the names of everyone who was with you," Sheriff Lens said, opening his notebook.

Both girls started to speak at once, but then Laura Fine yielded to Judy Irving. "There were seven of us. Angela wanted to go for one last bike ride—out past the Milkin farm—before she went off to college tomorrow."

Sheriff Lens interrupted with a question. "Mrs. Rinaldi, how old is Angela?"

"Seventeen. She'll be eighteen later this month. I can give you a graduation picture of her if it'll help."

"Thank you, it will. Go on, Judy. Who else was in the group?"

"Laura and I, and Angela's sister Ruthie." She motioned toward the younger girl on the sofa. Ruthie was perhaps thirteen and her features were similar, though she lacked the assurance I'd observed in Angela. "And the Homer brothers, who always tag along. And Ruthie's girl friend, Terry Brooks."

"The seven of you often go biking?"

"Sometimes just the three of us older girls go, but the rest of them like to follow us. Angela is sort of a leader, you see."

"What happened tonight?"

"We were all pretty much together at first, though Angela was leading the way as she always does. Gradually she pulled farther ahead, until—"

"How far ahead?"

Judy frowned, pondering it, until Laura said, "About the length of a football field. I was a cheerleader in school, and it was about the same length—a hundred yards."

"Did you reach the Milkin farm?" Sheriff Lens prompted.

Judy took up the story again. Her pretty blonde hair caught the light from the floor lamp and I wondered if she'd been a cheerleader, too. "Well, you know how the road curves to the right at the beginning of the Milkin property? There's a corn field there and we lost sight of Angela when she rounded the curve."

"For how long?"

"A few seconds."

"Maybe half a minute," Laura Fine confirmed. "No more than that, and probably less."

"Then what?"

Judy's bottom lip began to tremble as she tried to continue. "When we rounded the curve, she was gone! The—her bicycle was lying in the road about a hundred yards ahead, but there was no sign of her!

We thought she was hiding in a ditch or something, but she wasn't. We looked all over."

I cleared my throat and asked, "How dark was it?"

"Still daylight," Laura answered, trying to keep from crying, too. "Where the bicycle was, there were mowed fields of hay on both sides of the road. It was cut to within an inch or two of the ground. No one could have hidden there, Doctor."

"The ditches?"

"There weren't any."

"Did any cars or trucks pass?"

Judy blew her nose. "No. Not a car or truck or anything. The road was straight after we rounded the curve, and we could see all the way to the Milkin farmhouse about a mile away. There wasn't even a tractor out. And there were no people at all, not Angela or anyone else."

"It was as if," Laura said earnestly, "she rounded that curve and something reached out of the sky to take her away forever."

I woke early on Wednesday morning with Angela Rinaldi's fate very much on my mind. The first thing I did was phone Mary and tell her about it. "How many appointments do I have this morning?" I asked her.

"Just one."

"See if you can postpone it. I want to drive out to the Milkin farm and find out how the search is going. If there's an emergency, try to reach me at the Milkin place or through the sheriff's office."

I went outside and saw Henry Rinaldi across the street, standing by the garage door and staring up at the sky. "Hello," I said, walking across the street to join him. "Any news?"

He looked at me and I couldn't be certain if he remembered that I'd been in his house the previous night. "No, nothing," he replied.

The morning sun was making me squint and, as I turned away back toward my car, I remembered the last time I'd seen Angela on the previous evening, leading her pack down the driveway and into the street. The puddle was gone and I could see the diamond-shaped tread of her tires across the mud. It was all that remained of her, and a chill went through me when I considered the possibility that she might never be found.

I drove out the way I'd seen them go the previous evening, heading toward the Milkin farm. After a short time, I saw the field of tall

corn stalks by the curve in the road, obscuring what was ahead. There'd been more than one accident at that curve. When I rounded the bend, I saw several sheriffs' and state-police cars parked off the road. Men were in the fields, moving toward the distant woods. I spotted Sheriff Lens by his car and pulled up in front of it.

"Mornin', Doc. How you been?"

"Like you, thinking about the missing girl. Any clues yet?"

"Not a one. Her friends were right, you know. Nobody could hide in these fields without bein' seen. We were lookin' for some sort of trench or furrow that could be invisible from the road, but there isn't any."

"And she wouldn't have had time to make it all the way to the trees."

"Heck, no. It's a ten-minute walk."

"Someone picked her up. It's the only possibility."

"Who, though? And how come the kids didn't see a car or truck? You got pretty good visibility along this road."

I stared down the road, knowing he was right. "You talked with Fred Milkin yet? Maybe he saw something."

"Briefly, last night. The girls went there to use the phone when they couldn't find Angela. He says he didn't see a thing."

"Let's go talk to him again." I glanced around and asked, "What happened to the bicycle?"

"I sent it back to her family. We got a couple of prints off the metal, but without hers to compare with they're not much good."

We started walking up the road toward the grey farmhouse. "Do you think it's a sex crime, Sheriff?"

"I try not to think about it, Doc. If someone grabbed her, they had to have a reason, though, didn't they?"

"But if they grabbed her, where did they take her in those few seconds before the rest of the kids rounded the curve?"

Sheriff Lens shrugged. "Then there's the other possibility. I like that one even less."

"What other possibility?"

"Maybe something happened to her—a terrible accident of some sort. The kids were so panicked by it they hid the body and made up the whole story of her disappearance."

"Six children, Sheriff? One of them her own sister? No, that's even more impossible. The story they told us has to be true—so far as they know the truth."

We'd reached the farmhouse and Fred Milkin came out the door

to meet us. He'd obviously been watching events through the window. Milkin was a slim, middle-aged man who'd never married. He'd stayed on at the farm alone after his parents died, hiring help for the planting and harvesting as needed. "Hello, Fred!" I called to him. He'd been a patient of mine a few years back when I'd treated him for a skin condition.

"Hi, Doc. Hello, Sheriff. You got a lot of men out there."

"We want to find her, Fred. I only hope she's alive."

"Like I told you last night, I never saw a sign of her. I didn't know a thing until that bunch of kids came poundin' on the door to use the phone."

"Who did they call?" I asked.

"Her folks, and then I guess her dad notified you, Sheriff."

Sheriff Lens nodded. "Did you have anyone working around here yesterday, Fred?"

"Nobody. The hay's all cut."

"See any strangers? Hoboes, maybe?"

"Not lately."

We left Milkin standing in his yard, watching the progress of the search. I drove back to town and went to the office, but seeing patients was the last thing on my mind that day. I left by mid-afternoon and drove over to Laura Fine's house. Her family had a nice home, one of the newer ones in town, and everyone knew where it was. She was one of the few girls her age with a driver's license.

I pulled up just as she was getting into the family car. "Hello, Laura," I said.

"Dr. Hawthorne! Has there been news about Angela?"

"I'm afraid not. The police are still searching."

"I can't believe what happened. My folks can't believe it, either. Dad says people don't just disappear like that."

"Do you or Judy have any new ideas about what might have happened?"

"I certainly don't."

I caught the inflection in her voice. "What about Judy?"

"She's off playing detective somewhere. I've been trying to reach her all day."

I came to the point of my visit. "Laura, I want to ask you about Angela's boy friends."

"She didn't really have any. Nobody special, anyway."

"Did she go to the senior prom?"

"Yes—with Phil Gilbert. But that was nothing serious. He asked her and she wanted to go, so she said yes. She told me later he gave her a goodnight kiss and that was all."

"Where does Phil live?" I asked her. "I might drive over and speak with him."

"He's right on the next street, Dr. Hawthorne, but he's not home. I tried calling him last night about Angela and his mother said he was up at the family's cottage at Silver Lake. He's closing it up for the season."

"When's he due back?"

"Sometime tomorrow."

"Was there anyone else she went out with recently? Or anyone who asked her for a date and got turned down?"

"Not that I know of. But sometimes she was vague about boys."

I thanked her and went back and sat in my car, wondering if I was going about this in the wrong way. In the past when I helped Sheriff Lens with a case, I tried to figure out what had happened, and how. With Angela Rinaldi I had jumped ahead to the question of *who*. A stranger? A friend?

I looked at the dashboard clock and decided it was only a thirty-minute drive to Silver Lake.

The clerk at the crossroads store directed me to the Gilbert cottage on the lake. It was down a steep dirt road near the water's edge, and as I approached I could see a muscular young man putting up wooden shutters over the side windows. I parked my car next to his green Packard and got out.

"Hello, there!" I called. "Are you Phil Gilbert?"

He finished securing the shutter with a tack hammer and then turned with a grin. "That's me. What can I do for you?"

"I'm Dr. Sam Hawthorne. I drove over from Northmont. We're looking for Angela Rinaldi."

"Angela? What happened to her?"

"She's disappeared."

His grin changed to a frown and he walked closer to me, wiping his hands. "When did this happen?"

"Last evening, right after dinner. On the road out near the Milkin farm. The police and troopers are searching for her."

"My God—do they think she's been—?"

"No one knows what to think. I came here because I understand you took her to the senior prom this spring."

"Yeah. It was the only date I had with her. We didn't hit it off too well."

"Why not?" I asked.

He brushed the sandy hair from his forehead. He'd acquired a tan over the summer and his arms were almost brown. "We didn't seem to have the same interests. She was excited about going off to college and I was thinking about where I could find a job."

"Did you find one?"

"I worked here at the Boat Locker for the summer. Now I'm thinking about heading west."

"What about Angela? Was she seeing anyone else?"

"I think she had a couple of dates with Johnny Brooks, but it wasn't anything serious."

"Brooks?" Just then I couldn't remember why the name seemed familiar. "Was he in your class, too?"

"Sure, we all graduated in June. I've been up here all summer, though. I haven't heard a word from Angela."

"Your parents didn't call to tell you she was missing?"

He shook his head. "We have the phone turned off after Labor Day. No one comes up here in the fall."

"You don't have any idea how or why she disappeared, then?"

"None. Is her bike gone, too?"

"No, they found her bike in the middle of the road. There was just no sign of her."

"Weird."

"If you think of anything that might help, give Sheriff Lens or me a call, will you?"

"Glad to." I gave him our phone numbers. He took them, put them into his shirt pocket, and went back to his job with the shutters as I returned to the car.

It wasn't until I was driving back toward Northmont that I thought about the name Johnny Brooks. I didn't know the Brooks family, but I wondered if he might be an older brother of Terry Brooks, the young friend of Angela's sister Ruthie, who'd been the seventh member of their ill-fated bike ride.

As I pulled into the driveway of my house I saw Henry Rinaldi standing by his garage with Angela's blue bicycle. I walked across the street to join him. "Any word yet?" I asked.

He shook his head. "They brought this back today. It's all that's left of her."

"I'm sure she'll turn up, Henry."

Rinaldi ran his hands lovingly over the bicycle, over the worn leather seat and the cracked rubber handgrips, the bald tires, and the paint-chipped metal body. He gazed at the little bell on the left handlebar. "I used to help her when anything went wrong with this bike. I know it as well as I know Angela. Look—she even scratched her initials on the seat post so she'd know it was hers."

I bent down and saw the tiny *AR* scratched in the metal. "Did she go out with Johnny Brooks?" I asked casually as I straightened up.

"Brooks? You mean Terry's brother? I guess a few times. Why do you ask?"

"Someone she knew might have had a hand in her disappearance. I'm trying to talk with everyone who knew her."

Henry's face was suddenly grave. "Tell me the truth, Dr. Hawthorne. The police think she's dead, don't they?"

"They don't know. Nobody knows."

I left him before the tears appeared in his eyes. I didn't want to see him cry, yet I knew nothing that might hold back his tears.

A while later I phoned Sheriff Lens. They'd searched all day without finding a clue.

"Are you going to give up?" I asked.

"The State Police want to search for another day before calling it off. They're bringing in dogs tomorrow."

"What are they looking for? A grave?"

"What do you think, Doc?"

"I don't know," I answered honestly. "I've discovered she did go out with a couple of boys. I talked with Phil Gilbert this afternoon and tonight I'm going to search out Johnny Brooks."

"I can tell you *where* to search: He's the soda jerk at the Star Drug. Works most nights."

"Thanks, Sheriff," I said.

Angela's disappearance was big news among the teenagers who hung out at the Star Drug soda fountain. I saw Laura Fine in one of the booths in animated conversation with two boys and another girl. All along the counter there was a hum of conversation. I sat on one of the stools and waited for the fresh-faced youth behind the counter to get around to waiting on me.

"What'll you have?" he asked at last.

"Just a cherry Coke. Are you Johnny Brooks?"

"That's me." He picked up a Coke glass and squirted some syrup into it.

"I understand you went out with Angela Rinaldi a few times."

"Twice. My sister told me what happened last night. I can't believe it."

"Did you see her during the summer?"

"We went swimming once, that was all. I called her but she was always busy."

"A popular girl? Lots of boy friends?"

"None that I know of."

"What about Phil Gilbert? He took her to the senior prom, didn't he?"

"I guess." He stirred up the cherry Coke and set it in front of me. I put down a quarter and told him to keep the change. That made him a bit more talkative, but not much. "I think a truckload of Gypsies probably picked up Angela and kidnaped her."

"Really? I haven't seen any around these parts in a few years. Did your kid sister happen to see a truck last evening?"

"Naw, she didn't see anything. But she's only thirteen."

On my way out of the drugstore, Laura stopped me. "I saw you talking with Johnny Brooks."

"He went out with Angela a couple of times. I've been talking to Phil Gilbert, too."

"Have you seen Judy? Judy Irving? I'm still looking for her."

"Not yet. I probably should talk to everyone who was in the group last night. One of you must have seen something, even if you didn't realize it."

"I didn't see a thing—other than what we told you."

"How were Angela's relations with her father? Did they get along?"

"Oh, you know how fathers are. He wanted to be her pal but she had to be with her own friends."

"Was she anxious to get away to college?"

Laura looked hard at me. "You're speaking of her in the past, like she's dead."

"We have to consider that possibility. She's been missing for over twenty-four hours."

"She'll turn up somewhere."

"What about college?"

Laura shrugged. "She didn't talk about it much, but I think she felt bad about leaving her friends behind."

One of the other girls called to her and Laura went back to the booth. I strolled outside and stood for a moment looking up at the night sky.

In the morning, I was at my office in the physicians' wing of Pilgrim Memorial Hospital. Mary Best saw my pensive expression and asked, "Nothing on the Rinaldi girl yet?"

"Not a thing. The sheriff's still searching the fields. I talked to her father and some of her friends yesterday, but I didn't learn a thing."

"Do you think her father might be involved?"

"I don't see how. I was sitting on my porch from the time Angela left until you phoned me that evening. Neither of her parents left the house so far as I know. Their car was in the garage all evening."

"There are some patients at the hospital you should look in on."

I nodded. "I'll see them. Then maybe I'll take a ride out to the Milkin farm again. This might be the last day of the search if they don't find anything."

I got out there a little before noon. The State Police dogs were far out in one of the hay fields, barking like mad. I saw Sheriff Lens standing in the center of the road with Fred Milkin. One of the troopers had run up and was talking frantically. I parked and got quickly out of my car. The sheriff and Milkin were already starting across the field.

"Sheriff!" I called out.

He glanced in my direction and called back, "You're just in time, Doc—I think the dogs found her!"

My stomach felt like it might heave, but I started across the field to intersect their route. A half dozen State Police officers and four floppy-eared bloodhounds had converged on a spot near the edge of the woods. "Did they pick up her scent?" I asked.

One of the troopers with a barking dog on a leash said, "We didn't find anything near the road where her bike was, so we just let them roam the field at will. They sniffed out this."

The sheriff crouched to examine the newly turned soil. "It's recent, and about the size of a grave. Get some shovels in here."

She wasn't buried deep. The troopers' shovels struck the body less

than a foot down. They brushed the last of the dirt from her by hand and turned her over.

It wasn't Angela Rinaldi. It was her friend, Judy Irving.

By afternoon we had established that the cause of death was a blow to the left temple with some sort of blunt but slender object. It had penetrated far enough to be instantly fatal. "Ever see anything like it?" Sheriff Lens asked me.

"Not exactly, no."

"The city papers are onto this now, Doc. They say we got a homicidal maniac loose. The troopers have the dogs searchin' the area for another grave."

"Why didn't Judy's parents report her missing?"

"They did, this morning. I think they were afraid to call last night because they thought she might be spendin' the night with some boy."

"Had she ever done that before?"

"I guess she didn't come home after the senior prom."

"Who was her date?"

"Johnny Brooks. I'm on my way over to see him now, if you want to come along. What does the autopsy show about the time of death?"

"The preliminary results indicate she'd been dead about twenty-four hours when she was found. That would mean she died yesterday morning, though not in that field. You were searching it then."

Sheriff Lens nodded. "The killer thought it would be a safe place to bury her because we'd already searched there. He didn't know we'd be bringing in the dogs."

I accompanied him to Johnny Brooks' house. The young man from the drugstore was seated on his front porch with a tearful Laura Fine. "My two best friends in the world!" She wiped her eyes. "I can't believe it."

Sheriff Lens tried to comfort her. "We haven't found Angela yet. She could still be alive."

Johnny's kid sister Terry came out to join us, sitting silently by her brother. I took the opportunity to ask a question. "What about you, Terry? You were around the older girls a lot. You're a friend of Ruthie Rinaldi. Did they ever talk about running away from home together—Angela and Judy?"

Terry shook her head. "Angela was going to college."

"I'd have heard any talk like that," Laura spoke up.

"You were looking for Judy yesterday. You couldn't find her."

"Judy always wanted to play detective. She went off somewhere on her own."

"Did she have a car?"

She nodded. "Her dad gave her a used Ford for graduation."

"Then Angela was the only one of you three who didn't drive."

"Her folks are pretty strict. They wouldn't let her do much of anything till she turned eighteen."

I asked the sheriff, "Any sign of Judy's car?"

"Not yet."

But we'd come to question Johnny Brooks, and presently Sheriff Lens sent the girls inside so we could talk to him privately. The sheriff asked him about the dates he'd had with the dead girl.

"I took her to the senior prom," he admitted nervously.

"And stayed out all night?"

Brooks moistened his dry lips. "That's just something a lot of the kids do. It's harmless."

"Did Angela stay out all night with Phil Gilbert?" I asked.

He gave a little laugh. "Her parents would have killed her." He must have realized how that sounded and he corrected himself.

"They wouldn't have liked it."

"Do you know anyone who might have wanted to kill Judy Irving?" the sheriff asked him.

"No. Certainly not me!"

"What would you say if I told you the autopsy showed she was pregnant?"

It was a bluff and it didn't work. Brooks looked the sheriff in the eye and answered, "I'd say you were lying."

"Knew her pretty well, did you?"

"Well enough to know she didn't sleep with guys."

"Did you see her at all yesterday?"

"No. I hadn't been out with her lately."

"But you went out with Angela Rinaldi."

The youth shook his head in frustration. "You're making too much of this whole thing with their boy friends. You're gonna find they were both killed by some tramp out in the woods."

"But what were they doing in the woods?" I asked. "And how did Angela vanish from her bicycle?"

"I don't know, but I didn't have a thing to do with it," he said.

Sheriff Lens offered to drop me at my office. On the way back, something kept bothering me.

"We didn't learn much there," the sheriff said.

"On the contrary. We learned something very important."

"What's that?"

"Laura and Judy both drove cars."

"What does that have to do with anything, Doc? Angela was riding a bicycle when she disappeared, and so were the other two."

"Humor me, Sheriff. Drive me out to Silver Lake to see Phil Gilbert again."

"What for?"

"Just a hunch."

"All right," he said. "I know your hunches."

A half hour later, as we approached the steep road down to the Gilberts' lakeside cottage, I asked him to stop the car. "Give me five minutes and then follow me in."

"What in hell are you up to, Doc?"

"We'll see."

I went down the road on foot, trying not to attract attention. Phil Gilbert had finished boarding up the cottage windows for the winter, but the door on the side facing the lake was standing open. I opened the screen door and walked in.

Angela Rinaldi jumped to her feet. "Who are you?" she almost screamed.

It was the closest I'd ever been to her. She wasn't across the street in her yard or bicycling down the road, she was right there facing me, a few feet away. "I'm your neighbor across the street," I told her. "My name is Sam Hawthorne."

Phil Gilbert heard our voices and came quickly out of the kitchen, holding a beer bottle. Angela kept talking. "What are you doing here? How did you find me?"

"I came to take you back to your parents."

She went over to stand near Gilbert. "I'm never going back! Phil and I are driving to California tomorrow. There's nothing you can say that would change my mind."

"Angela," I told her, "your friend Judy Irving is dead. Phil here killed her with a tack hammer."

As my words sunk in, her face seemed to come apart and she started screaming. It was the most terrible sound I'd ever heard.

Sheriff Lens came into the room and took the beer bottle from Phil Gilbert's hand. I'd gotten Angela to sit down and was trying

to comfort her. "You'd better cuff him," I told the sheriff. "He's your man."

"This is Angela Rinaldi?" he asked. "Alive?"

"Very much alive. Let's get them back to town and I'll explain everything."

We drove directly to the sheriff's office. He phoned Angela's parents to tell them she was alive, and while we waited for them to arrive I told him what he needed to know. "Start with Angela's disappearance," he said. "Explain that first."

"I should have tumbled to that a lot sooner than I did. You see, Angela and Phil Gilbert have been in love since the night of the senior prom, I imagine. Instead of going to college, she planned to run away with him. We've heard how strict her parents are. There was no chance they'd ever give their blessing to such a thing, so she decided to stage her own disappearance, with Phil's help."

"How?"

"She figured everyone would be looking around here for her and they could be halfway across the country before anyone realized they'd run off together. They'd kept their relationship a secret all summer."

"Doc—"

I smiled at him. "All right, Sheriff. How'd she do it? I watched her ride out Tuesday night with the other kids following. I saw her ride through a puddle at the edge of the road and yesterday morning her tire tracks were still there, imprinted in the mud. I could see the diamond pattern of the tread. But later in the day I spoke with her father as he showed me her blue bike that you found in the center of the road. I saw the place where she'd scratched her initials. And I saw the bicycle's bald tires."

"What?"

"The blue bike you found in the road, Angela's bike without question, wasn't the blue bike she was riding when she left home that night."

"How is that possible, Doc?"

"There's only one possible explanation. Gilbert supplied her with a second blue bicycle, identical to her own, though a bit newer. He took hers out there in his car and left it in the road a minute or two before they approached. Angela, riding ahead of the others as she often did, rounded the curve, out of sight for a moment, and rode off the road into that field of tall cornstalks. The girls and the younger

children rode right past where she hid, seeing only the abandoned blue bicycle a hundred yards down the road. After they went to Milkin's farm to phone home, she rode back to where Gilbert was waiting with his car."

"How did you know it was Gilbert?"

"Her father wasn't involved, because he was home at the time it happened. Angela herself had to be a party to the disappearance because she'd have realized the bike wasn't hers even if no one else did. A boy friend seemed most likely. There were only two mentioned—Phil Gilbert and Johnny Brooks. When I called on Gilbert at the lake yesterday, I told him only that Angela had disappeared while out riding with her girl friends. Though the cottage phone was disconnected and he claimed to know nothing about the occurrence, he asked me a while later if her bike had disappeared, too. How did he know she was on a bike ride and not a car ride? Both of her girl friends drove cars. He drove a car himself. A ride would have suggested a car ride before a bike ride, to any innocent person."

Sheriff Lens nodded. "And Judy Irving?"

"I think she came searching for Angela up at the cottage. She must have had her own clue that they might be hiding there. When I arrived, Gilbert was nailing the shutters closed with a tack hammer. I remembered that thin, blunt head when I saw the wound in Judy Irving's temple. I think he lashed out and hit her with it when she threatened to tell everyone where Angela was hiding. Then he waited until dark and drove her body back to the Milkin farm, figuring, as you pointed out yourself, that the police wouldn't search it again."

"Angela didn't know he killed Judy?"

I shook my head. "When I got her quieted down in the car she told me she'd been swimming while he put up the shutters. She also said he found some excuse to throw the tack hammer away in the rubbish. You'll want to go back there for it. You'll probably find her car on one of those back roads, unless he drove it into the lake."

Sheriff Lens grinned at me. "You were guessin' back at the cottage, Doc. Even if Phil Gilbert was involved in the disappearance, he might not have killed the Irving girl."

"You play the odds, Sheriff. Judy came looking for Angela. Was I to believe she found an entirely separate criminal with a weapon shaped just like Gilbert's tack hammer?"

"Angela might have been an accomplice to the killing."

"No, she rode out with those girls on Tuesday night because they

were her closest friends. She wasn't going off to college, but she was going far away, where she'd never see them again. She wouldn't have killed Judy, or stuck with Gilbert if she knew he had. She's a decent girl who got mixed up with the wrong boy."

That's what it was like as the summer of '36 ended. I never saw Angela ride her bicycle again.



ON OUR COVER

San Francisco author Joe Gores is the only writer to have won the Mystery Writers of America Edgar in three categories: short story ("Goodbye, Pops"), television drama ("No Immunity for Murder" on *Kojak*), and first novel (*A Time for Predators*).

Gores was born and raised in Rochester, Minnesota. He graduated from Notre Dame University and worked as a logger, a hod-carrier, a driver, a carnival helper, and a gym instructor before becoming a private investigator in 1955. He was an investigator for twelve years before devoting himself fulltime to writing and he credits the writing of thousands of client reports as his teacher in how to tell a story.

His novels include *Dead Skip*, *Final Notice*, and *Gone, No Forwarding*, which feature the auto repossessioners, Dan Kearney Associates, the same team of operatives who appear in the "File" stories well known to our readers. Among his other books is the highly acclaimed, *Hammett*, a fictional re-creation of San Francisco in 1928 which combines Dashiell Hammett the writer and Hammett the detective. The novel was made into a movie by Francis Ford Coppola in 1983. A new DKA novel, *32 Cadillacs*, will be published by the Mysterious Press in 1992.

EQMM 50TH ANNIVERSARY CONTEST

Five more questions in our contest celebrating EQMM's 50th year of publication. Hold off sending your answers until all fifty questions have appeared—five an issue between the January and October issues, inclusive. All rules and pertinent information are on the facing page.

16., 17., and 18. A writer and two of her four daughters made names for themselves in the field of mystery fiction from the Thirties through the Eighties. All three writers contributed stories to EQMM. What are their names?

19. What great detective-story writer died on *The Titanic*?

20. What was the sobriquet of the fictional detective, Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen?

- First Prize: Limited-edition poster of *EQMM*'s first cover
Fifty Years of the Best from Ellery Queen, edited by
Eleanor Sullivan, published by Carroll & Graf
Ellery Queen 50th Anniversary mug
The option to appear on a cover of *EQMM* with a ce-
lebrity of the winner's choice who agrees to said cover
- Second and Third Prizes: Limited-edition poster of *EQMM*'s first
cover
- Fourth through Thirteenth Prizes: *Fifty Years of the Best from Ellery
Queen*
- Fourteenth through Twenty-third Prizes: Ellery Queen 50th An-
niversary mugs

The winner will be the top scorer in answering 50 questions related to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*—there will be 5 questions an issue from January through October 1991. In case of a tie, the earliest postmark will determine the winner. The deadline is October 15, 1991—entries should carry a postmark no later than that date.

All 50 questions must be submitted as a unit, the pages or copies of the pages for all ten issues together. Material sent in sections will not be considered. Only one entry will be allowed per person. All entries must include the contestant's legal name and full address. No entries will be returned, even if accompanied by a return envelope. Winners will be notified by mail and announced in the March 1992 issue. (No phone calls, please.)

Contributors to *EQMM* are not eligible to win the contest, nor are employees and their immediate families of Davis Publications, Inc., Carlson Promotion Group, or any of their affiliated agents, advertising, and promotional production agencies. All applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations apply.

By entering the contest, all prize winners agree that Davis Publications and any of their respective agencies, affiliates, and employees shall have no liability for any injury, loss, or damage of any kind resulting from acceptance, possession, or use of any prize. Prizes are not transferable and are unreturnable. Davis Publications reserves the right to substitute a prize for one of equal or greater value and is not responsible for lost, late, damaged, or misdirected entries.

a **NEW** short story by

JOE GORES

After Joe Gores posed for the cover of this issue, he decided he would write a story around the scenario. When he sent the completed story in toward the end of August last year, he wrote: "I'm only glad your art director didn't come up with something tough to build a story around, like Gores wearing gauzy wings and embedded in the middle of a big slab of amber. Then I'd have to write the first paleoanthropological crime story."

The Durants' arguments, which were getting more frequent, had always been about the same thing: Danny's desire—no, his need—to be the uncaring, wise-cracking, unsentimental tough guy of the classic private-eye tale. Sam Spade. Philip Marlowe. Lew Archer. Spenser. Amos Walker. Danny Durant . . .

SLEEP THE BIG SLEEP

by JOE GORES

Murder.
My meat.

I'm Danny Durant. Two hundred forty-four pounds of bronzed dynamite, lightning in both fists, an Army Colt .45 automatic like Mike Hammer's under my arm (with seven notches in the walnut grip to remind me of the men I've killed), a bottle of Old Granddad in the desk drawer, a blonde hellcat in the bedroom.

Well, I guess that's not all quite true. The 244 pounds is really 144, and I look like Woody Allen in his stand-up-comedian days, right down to the heavy hornrims because I'm myopic (OD-1 sph/OS-1 sph) and contacts make my eyes tear up. Whoever heard of a tough P.I. looks like he's gonna bust out crying any second? Far from a blonde hellcat I have Emily in my bed, so small and dark-haired

© 1991 by Joe Gores.

and intense she was nicknamed "Midge" in high school. And she's my wife besides.

I've gone this far, you may as well know the rest of it. I don't own a gun, I don't have a license to carry one, I've never *fired* one. I've never even punched anybody out—my mom wanted me to be a classical musician, so I couldn't do sports or anything for fear of damaging my hands. I took piano all through grade school and high school, then quit entirely as soon as I went away to college. Race Williams might play "The Minute Waltz" on some bozo's backbone, but on a *Steinway*?

But I do have my P.I. license. I worked for Dun & Bradstreet summers in college and several years full-time thereafter; no booze, blondes, or bullets writing D&B credit reports, but it gave me the hours of investigative field work to qualify for the P.I. exam. Which I creamed. I really studied for the legal parts of it, and as for the questions about procedure, Hammett's Op stories are a primer in the fine points of working those mean streets.

So I have my license and I have an office. Okay, so it's over our garage, but even Sam Spade had to start somewhere. My sign down at the end of the driveway has *We Never Sleep* arched over a big open eye like an eyebrow, and lettered underneath:

DANNY DURANT

Private Investigations

Cool—Careful—Confidential—Discreet

I stole the eye from Pinkerton's and the adjectives from George Anson Phillips in *The High Window*—the only P.I. novel Emily ever read all the way through. George is a terrible detective, and gets killed besides, so his adjectives on my sign are the ironic gesture of the tough guy, full of bittersweet meaning. Emily just thought they were silly.

Our arguments, which have been getting more frequent, have always been about the same thing: my desire—no, my *need*—to be the uncaring, wise-cracking, unsentimental tough guy of the classic private-eye tale. Sam Spade. Philip Marlowe. Lew Archer. Spenser. Amos Walker. *Danny Durant*!

Emily has a point, of course; she's trying to get started as a psychotherapist just like I'm trying to get started as a private eye. But I have an office and she has to use an empty room at Public Health—she gets most of her referrals through her best friend Claire, who works there. Emily says it's like a lawyer taking *pro bono* work to get his name known.

Here I am hung up on the private-eye stuff, and Emily can't stand violence. Reason is, she's an orphan and she's had this recurring nightmare since she was five or six. This huge guy abducts her on a rainy, blowy, stormy night, takes her to a big sort of mansionlike place, and is going to do something terrible to her, but right at the last minute this sort of hero figure tries to rescue her. Either the hero dies, or the bad guy dies—she always wakes just before the end.

I'm not so sure it was just a nightmare. Maybe it's something that almost really did happen, that she's forgotten the way Anthony Galton did in *The Galton Case*—she doesn't know who her parents were. Maybe that's why she went into psychotherapy; trying to help herself by helping others. In the photo she has of herself at six, her eyes are dark and haunted.

So she really *hates* to be alone in a rainstorm at night. So of course we had this terrible argument on the night of this really grotesque cloudburst. Maybe the rain was to blame; I know it made my hair curl and my nerves jump and my skin itch just like the hot dry Santa Anas did in Chandler's *Red Wind*.

Anyway, Emily had tears in her eyes. "Danny, it has to stop! You just aren't cut out to be a hard-boiled private detective. If you were good at it that would be one thing, but we're broke and in debt and the house payment is coming up—"

"You don't know that."

"It's due the fifteenth of every—"

"You don't know that I'm not cut out to be a detective! Any more than we know you're cut out to be a psychotherapist."

"I have my Ph.D. I have my license in clinical psychology. I have clients. Some of them even pay me!"

"I've got my license, too."

"And how many clients in the six months since you put that crazy sign up?"

I said, with great dignity, "Just one. Billy Jenkins. But—"

"Who's twelve years old. Whose dog was missing."

"I found him, didn't I?"

"And got paid a dollar." Emily is a couple of inches shorter even than I am, with wavy brown hair and direct brown eyes and a slightly uptilted nose and lovely lips that even in the middle of the argument I wanted to kiss.

"Honey, I know it hasn't been easy," I said. "This isn't 'Frisco or LaLa Land or the Big Apple or even the Big Easy. Not even the

Twin Cities. It's a little town in southeastern Minnesota where not much happens. I gotta get a rep, bust some bad guys, solve a big case—"

"Please, please, just *listen* to yourself, Danny! Whenever you go into that—that detective *lingo*—"

But then she melted into my arms. I didn't know if she was laughing or crying. Maybe a little bit of both. Her hair tickled my nose with a clean, herbal-shampoo smell.

"Oh, Danny, what are we going to do? You aren't the tough, cynical, devious-minded man in those detective novels you read. You're sweet and gentle and bright and a dreamer, and those are the things I love you for. But you're ruining our lives with these fantasies! You know it's the split in you, your dark side coming out."

I said our arguments were about me wanting to be a tough private eye, but that isn't quite right. They were also about her telling me *why* I wanted to be a tough private eye.

It all went back, she always said, to the fact that a hunk of every man is defensive, angry, impelled by a non-rational urge for revenge against what it sees as the feminine. Because, according to Jung or Freud or somebody, when we're separated from our mothers we feel rejected and so we reject our own feminine side in turn, try to anchor ourselves in the masculine.

In men like me, sweet and gentle on the outside, our masculine ego gets isolated from the rest of the psyche and generates a shadow complex. This masculine dark side, repressed and what Emily calls ego-alien, rebels against patriarchal and paternal authority. Like Satan resisting God.

Get the picture? The sweeter a guy is, the more of a mess he is. And it gets worse. Because this savage sort of shadow figure gets together with that rejected feminine side and they form a psychological complex that gets projected onto real women. This complex sees women as evil, is scared of them.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why I want to be a tough private eye. And why Emily and I were always fighting. Because of my dark side. My repressed shadow figure. See what I mean? All of a sudden she was my therapist instead of my wife.

"Don't start that psychobabble again," I said. "I'm not one of your patients."

"Well, you ought to be."

Would Mike Hammer take that? Would Max Thursday? Heck, would Kinsey Millhone? V. I. Warshawski would kick a lung out of

anyone said that to her. I grabbed my trenchcoat and fedora and paused in the open doorway to snarl the Op's speech to Princess Zhukovski in "The Gutting of Couffignal."

"You think I'm a man and you're a woman. That's wrong. I'm a manhunter and you're something that has been running in front of me. There's nothing human about it."

"Danny!" she cried behind me. "Don't go! Please!"

I shouldn't have, of course. Emily had gotten mad because she was scared. Of the night, of the dark, of the rain, of being alone. But I stopped only long enough to get the miniature airline bottle of whiskey out of my desk drawer, then I jumped into my old sedan and drove away from there.

As I followed the moving tunnel my headlights carved into the night, I felt at first like Lew Archer in the opening of "Gone Girl" as he tooled home from the Mexican border in a light-blue convertible and a dark-blue mood. But one trouble with stalking out of your own house in the middle of the night is that you don't have anyplace to go. After a while the wipers slapping their monotonous refrain against the windshield started to sound like *rotten guy, rotten guy*.

By then I was at the outskirts of Plummerton, a hundred miles from home. The town was named after Ezekiel Plummer. In the 1920s he had single-handedly brought the railroad through for the meat-packing plant that was still the town's chief industry. I was too exhausted to drive back in the rain, so I used the off-ramp to the access road, went by a couple of all-night fast-food restaurants, a shopping mall, and then spotted an old-fashioned flashing neon sign:

VACANCY . . . VACANCY . . . VACANCY . . .

U-shaped place around a swimming pool whose dark surface was cratered by the rain's mortar fire. Cheery yellow light from the office. I splashed through the puddles to pay \$19.95 plus tax—in advance because my only luggage was the airline whiskey miniature I'd brought from my desk drawer.

By then I was feeling pretty rotten about myself and Emily. I set the miniature on the bedside table and sat on the bed to call her. The phone rang. And rang and rang and rang.

I tried again. Emily wasn't home. Or if she *was* home—

I leaped up. I'd get back in the car and drive home right then, no matter how tired I was, no matter how—

No. She'd gone over to Claire's, that was all. When I'd been on the road for Dun & Brad, in lousy weather she'd always stayed over

at Claire's. They'd been roommates and Claire was still her best friend and confidante.

After ten P.M., there was no answer at Claire's, either. So they'd gone to a movie, stopped someplace for a snack after. I'd try again in a half hour.

I turned on the TV and lay down on the bed with my clothes on, water-spattered trenchcoat and all. I was Spenser in *Promised Land* and Susan Silverman had walked out on me because I wouldn't say I loved her. Spenser drank bourbon, I drank bourbon: a big slug out of the miniature. And coughed and choked. Wow! Whiskey all alone like that was really potent.

And the darn sound on the TV set didn't work. Too bad, because there was a private-eye thriller on, one of the old black-and-whites that colorization has made into antiques. About this beautiful little dark-haired girl, only five or six, being kidnaped in the parking lot of a rainswept shopping mall.

I took a second, more cautious sip, emptied the bottle.

Even without sound, I can tell the passer-by who tries to stop the kidnaper is a wanna-be private eye who happens to be in the right place at the right time. What I wouldn't give for a chance like that! To face the bad guy, save the girl, show that I was like my heroes in the hard-boiled detective novels!

The kidnaper is a huge guy in black: black jeans, black Navy watch cap, muscles rippling beneath his black sweater. A strong face, sun-darkened and craggy, strong jaws. The way I wanted to look as a kid—except for the crazy, angry eyes.

I never wanted that hatred, that rage, that blackness in my gaze. I always wanted to be the hero, not the villain.

Just as he drags the screaming girl into his car, this scrawny little P.I. in his rain-soaked trenchcoat throws himself on the big guy's back. He is swatted away, his hornrim glasses flying, catching the light. The kidnaper roars away with the little girl in the car while the camera comes in on the P.I.'s face as he lies on the blacktop crying in the rain.

The P.I. wears my face. There on the TV. My face. He is me!

The image was already gone. A huckster was selling a car in living color, the sound blaring. I realized I was sweating. I lunged for my bottle. Empty. I sat there with it in my hands. I must have imagined the whole thing. Worn out from the emotional scene with Emily

earlier, then the long drive, being unable to reach her, a couple of jolts of booze.

And I needed a couple more. I shrank the huckster to a white dot, to nothing. I didn't want to watch any more. Not hallucinating as I was. I still had on my coat and shoes, so I picked up the key off the dresser and went out into the rain.

I remembered passing a shopping mall, so I sloshed past the now-darkened motel office and down the narrow drive to the almost-empty acre of blacktopped parking lot. At the far end, warm yellow light shone out from a liquor store through almost horizontal wind-blown spears of rain. A pale Continental was just pulling up in front. A tall woman with pale hair to match the car, bare-headed in the rain, jumped out and ran inside, leaving her lights on and the motor running.

I slopped my way across the lot, shoulders hunched. It was a filthy night. I was soaked to the knees and water was running down my glasses, steaming them up. Wind whipped and tore at me. One especially heavy gust blew me sideways a couple of feet.

I reached the light-halo laid down through the store windows. Inside, the blonde was at the counter buying something that looked like cough medicine. That's when it happened.

A wide-stanced gleaming black sportscar spun around in a controlled skid, looking like the batmobile, its spinning wheels throwing out sheets of water. This huge dark shape hurtled from it and ran across the intervening blacktop to the blonde's Connie before the sportscar even stopped.

This time for real. This time in color and with sound. And with real sensations. I could feel the rain hitting my face. Could hear the slap of his soles against the blacktop, the sudden screams of the little girl as he reached across the front seat of the Continental and dragged her out with one thick arm.

Screams. Little arms stretching out to me for help.

I leaped.

Landed on the kidnaper's back like a monkey on a gorilla as he shoved the girl into the car, which was growling in rhythmic snorts like one of the big cats gearing itself for the charge.

A tree-trunk arm sweeping me aside, in a myopic blur my glasses arching away from me, glinting in the falling rain, my room key flying from my hand, macadam slamming the side of my face, rain in my mouth, rolling over twice, a face looking down at me fleetingly.

That face. The face from the television. Bulging jaws, glittering

eyes, heavy brows, a handsome, dissolute, vicious face, full of rage and fear and paranoia because he hated his father and feared women, feared their usurpation of his power, *how did I know that?* the mouth wide, perfect teeth gleaming.

Laughing. At me.

The car roaring away, huge and mythic from my ground-level viewpoint, acrid exhaust in my face.

Despairing cries from the open doorway of the liquor store, "*Em! Emmy! Oh my God, Emmy!*"

Salty tears against my lips. I had failed. But then up, on my feet, running as hard as I could through the rain after the car. Shouting something, only sounds, no words, no meaning.

Rage. For the first time in my life, blind rage. "*Come back and fight! You bastard! You bastard!*"

But the ersatz batmobile was gone. I stood there in the rain with water slamming my shoulders, running off my curled fingertips.

Defeated. Ineffective. Impotent.

The mother had called her *Em*. And then *Emmy*. Emily! I hadn't seen her face, but— No, I couldn't deal with that. This was *my* nightmare, not my Emily's little-girl nightmare.

And somehow it had been showing on my TV.

Real-life drama. On my television.

I snatched up my glasses and ran back toward my motel unit. I'd lost my key, but the door, swollen with moisture, hadn't closed all the way.

Snap! Slight crackle. The set warming up.

The picture springs to life. Black-and-white. No sound. Motel room. Arty shot, P.I. subjective camera suddenly swings to the door. Someone knocking?

I *hear* the knocking. How can I hear—

It was someone knocking at *my* door. In real life.

On the TV, the viewpoint camera hesitates, then moves to the door. A hesitant hand reaches into the frame to turn the knob.

I was at my own door, terrified at the same time that my hand, of its own volition, already had opened the door.

On the TV, a man steps through the open door. Black rain slicker. Holding up a leather pocket case, flopped open to show a gleaming badge.

The man in my open doorway, streaming rain from his shiny black slicker and holding up his badge, said, "Lieutenant Kellerman. Police. We found your room key in the parking lot."

Two Lieutenant Kellermans. One in my room, one on the TV screen. The same man, both places. Only now the TV screen is blank. The set has gone dead.

The Plummer mansion was a huge old stone place with hardwood paneling, antique furniture, and oriental carpets that did little to soften the austerity. While Kellerman waited for the ransom call, I tried to get a composite of the kidnaper with the police IdentiKit. At the same time calling Emily, then Claire, and getting *her*. It was on speakerphone, so they could hear us, but by then I didn't care.

"Where are you?" Claire demanded. "Emily borrowed my car and is driving all over southern Minnesota trying to find you. I stayed here in case you called. She's in a frenzy. She's—"

"I'm in Plummerton at—"

"That's over a hundred miles away!"

"—the A-One Motel on the freeway access road. Tell her—" I'd been about to say, Tell her I'm finally getting a chance to be a hero, but, belatedly aware of the listening ears, I finished lamely, "Tell her I love her."

And hung up because Kellerman was making slashing gestures across his throat. He was a fleshy middle-aged man with bloodhound eyes and more hair in his ears than on his head. He was staring at me steadily. "Emily? Your wife's name is Emily?"

"Yes."

He was silent for a long time. Then in a flat voice he just said, "Quite a coincidence."

I turned the IdentiKit around toward him.

"I guess this is about as close as I can come."

He scanned it quickly, then turned and raised his voice to call through the open door into the next room.

"Mrs. Plummer? Could you come in here, please?"

The blonde woman came in. Despite being close to hysterics, she reminded me of Eileen Wade in *The Long Goodbye*, walking like a dream into the Ritz-Beverly Hotel bar, slim and tall in white linen and with hair that looked to Marlowe like the pale gold of a fairy princess. But her voice trilled with suppressed tension.

"Did he call? Do whatever he says! I'll pay anything! I just want—" she started to sob "—just want my baby back."

Kellerman said uncomfortably, "No call yet, Mrs. Plummer. We'll do everything your way when it does come in." He gestured at the

IdentiKit. "Meanwhile, Mr. Durant has given us an idea of what the kidnaper looks like."

She bent to study the composite, then shook her head regretfully. "N—no, I've never seen that man before."

"Damn," muttered Kellerman under his breath. He turned to me. "We all want to thank you, Mr. Durant," he said with a false heartiness, "for what you tried to do, and for this composite. Now I can have one of my men run you back to your motel."

The phone rang.

The plainclothes cop at the extension turned on the recorder and pointed at Mrs. Plummer.

"H—hello?"

With the speakerphone we could hear both sides of the conversation.

Harsh voice, like his laughter. "I know you got the cops there, but—"

"My baby, my Emily, is she—"

"Shut up! I only say it once. I want the jewelry you keep in the safe behind Old Man Plummer's portrait. All of it, including the star sapphire. I want the geek to deliver it."

"The geek? Who—"

"Little guy jumped on my back."

Kellerman was making gestures, mouthing silent words at her. She spoke hesitantly into the phone as she stared at him. "Why—him? What's—your connection with—"

"I know his face, know what he looks like. He's the only delivery boy I can be sure ain't a cop in drag. Send him back to his motel room to wait. I'll call again with the drop point."

They gave me the jewelry. I think Kellerman was suspicious I'd been in on it from the start, but what else could he do?

"Drive Mr. Durant back to the motel, Brian. Then wait outside in your car in case he needs some assistance. We wouldn't want him to lose all that jewelry, would we?"

As usual, I was of two minds: me and my shadow-figure, I guess Emily would have said, were in disagreement. My private eye wanted to be a bagman, but what Emily called the real me knew I'd blow this the way I'd blown the girl's rescue and that's why the kidnaper wanted me involved. *The geek*. At that moment, like Jacob Asch in Arthur Lyons' *Other People's Money*, I knew without a doubt that I was not Sam Spade.

The uniformed cop was talkative on the way back down the winding narrow blacktop driveway. He pointed out a tall stone tower, no longer used, completely separate from the huge rambling 37-room mansion. The original Plummer had housed a powerful telescope there for astronomical observations and had been a collector in the Hearst vein—except, said the cop, his manias had run to the dark side of man: weapons, armor, devices of torture set up in the dungeonlike basement of the tower.

"I guess he was the current Mr. Plummer's grandfather."

"There isn't any current Mr. Plummer," said the cop. "He was forty years older than—" a gesture with his thumb "*—she* is. His first wife committed suicide after their infant daughter was kidnaped and never returned."

"*Kidnaped?*" I exclaimed. "Then tonight was just a repeat of something that happened—"

"Twenty years ago. He wanted an heir in the worst way, so seven years ago he married *this* one. She got pregnant right after they were married." His expression was a leer. "And then was widowed when *this* kid was just a little baby." He added, "Because Old Man Plummer, *he* was murdered."

"*Murdered?*"

"In the tower basement. In a thing full of big spikes."

"An iron maiden?"

"Better—they could see the guy get it in this. Two big slabs full of spikes, opened like a book. From Spain in the Middle Ages, I guess. There's a mechanism that closes 'em like shutting that book. Balance wheels, somebody's gotta push a lever to get it going. Somebody did." Another significant pause. "*She* was in Chicago with the baby when it happened."

"Conveniently in Chicago?"

"You didn't hear me say it."

Back at my room I sat on the foot of the bed, still in my trenchcoat, drained. Maybe when the cops called with the drop location, I could still— Who was I kidding? If I couldn't stop the kidnaping when the TV had told me ahead of time what was happening, how could I stop it now?

Unless—

I began flipping through the channels. Nothing. Prime-time dramas. Sitcoms. Cable movies. Phone-company commercial with a guy punching out a number on a phone, his back to the camera. The set

looked like one of those European castles that have tours to pay their taxes.

But wait. The color fades. The sound goes dead. The guy turns toward the camera. Yes! Him!

My phone rang.

I hesitated, then snatched it up. *His* voice. Heavy and brutal, dripping testosterone. "It's time."

I prayed my voice wouldn't crack with my fear. "Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah. Just you and me. No cops. Or else."

On the TV screen, his long arm drags little Emily into the frame. He is grinning. He has one ham hand clamped around the back of her neck and he shakes her slightly. Her little head jerks back and forth dangerously.

On the phone her voice whispered, "*Please—*"

"Stop!" I yelled. "I'll come! I'll come! Where are you?"

On the TV they are in a sort of dungeonlike room, with stone steps in the background winding around a stone pillar from above. And in that instant I knew where they were.

But I said again, stalling for time, "Where are you?"

Because on the screen *I am creeping down those stairs behind him!* In my rain-darkened trenchcoat and fedora, a tire iron clutched in one hand, I am carefully, silently, trying to sneak up on him as he stands facing the camera.

"You know where I am," he said.

"Yes," I admitted. I am creeping across the tiles. Twenty feet behind him. Sixteen. "But how can I get out of the motel room? The cops are watching it."

Twelve feet. Ten. So slowly. So silently.

"Go out the bathroom window."

"My car's out in front. Next to the cop's car."

Eight. Six.

"Mine's in back," he said. "With the keys in it."

I raise the tire iron high overhead.

And he laughed into the phone as on the screen he whirls, grabbing my arm, twisting the tire iron away as if it's papier-mache. He hurls me across the room—which is full of the implements of war and torture.

Hurls me into a wedge-shaped contraption of great slabs with daggerlike spikes imbedded in it. They rip at my flesh through my trenchcoat as I am rammed between them.

To one side, massive gearwheels. And the lever! His hands throw

it. The camera follows him as he crosses to the slabs. They are slowly inching together. I am between them. As I watch, one of the spikes slowly, excruciatingly pierces my outflung hand and comes out the back of it. Blood. My mouth is open. I am screaming silently.

He is laughing. Silently.

But I can hear his laughter in the telephone.

"If you don't wanna come, it's the little girl who—"

"I'll be there!" I said.

He said: "You wouldn't quit. You wouldn't give up. So now one of us has to die. You know that, don't you, pal?"

I heard my own voice saying, "Yeah, I know that. Pal."

How did I know that?

A hundred yards below, the barbered lawns draped over the top of the hill like green icing, a narrow, muddy, leaf-covered track went off around the back of the hill. I turned the low-slung black sportscar into it instinctively. It ended in a gravel parking area for the maintenance people. I got out. The tire iron was in the carpet-lined trunk.

What was I doing here? Was I crazy? I had just seen my own death on the television.

Since I knew where he was, I wouldn't come down the stone steps from above as he expected. Instead, I'd surprise him.

The rain whipped around me, splattered against the felt crown of my hat. I longed for a cigarette, although I'd never smoked one in my life. I realized I was terrified. *Terrified.*

My own death!

But then I remembered what Marlowe said in *The Big Sleep* as he drove away from the Sternwood mansion for the last time: "What did it matter once you were dead? You just slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of how you died or where you fell."

I had to save little Emmy. Alone. Maybe even then I had some foreknowledge of who I had to save her from.

I left the ransom in the car—I knew he wasn't here for money. *How did I know that?* I moved across the sodden leaves to the sunken rear entrance to the tower. It had mossy, discolored stone flanking it and grass growing up between the underfoot flagstones. He wouldn't expect me to know about it.

How did I know that?

I'd known the old hand-hammered iron hinges would squeak slightly as I opened the heavy hand-carved oak door just wide enough to slip through sideways. There are advantages to being slight. Of

course, if you were huge and muscular you didn't have to worry about making noise. You just did what you wanted.

Defied your father's authority.

Thwarted the terrible power and intelligence of Woman.

Well, what did you expect? Excluded, walled away. Nobody there with you but—*her*.

He'd always known about me. But until tonight I hadn't known about him. Now I did. That was my edge.

This doorway opened directly onto the basement floor. Dread implements of man's most awful pleasures were all around me. The only lighting was from smoky torches set in angled wrought-iron sconces fixed to the pillars that supported the tower. How had they furnished enough light for the video cameras that—

Wait! I hunkered down behind a pillar, my hand sweaty around the tire iron. *What I had seen on that TV screen hadn't happened yet!* It wasn't real yet!

Was I lying in the rain on the shopping-mall parking lot?

Or asleep in the motel-room bed, all this a dream?

Or with Emmy in our own bed, in the bonds of hallucination?

Or lying in a hospital bed, dying of a fatal concussion from the parking-lot confrontation?

I edged around the pillar to peer into the shadowed reaches of the basement. No sign of the girl or the kidnaper.

One of us has to die. You know that, don't you, pal?

Yes, I know that.

I edged past a rack with a great wooden wheel on which victims would be stretched and broken. A chair with short thick spikes on the seat and the back. An iron cage for dunking someone into boiling oil. Then, the modified iron maiden in which Plummer had died: two marble slabs partially open like a book, long cruel spikes gleaming.

Little Emmy ran toward me from the shadows, arms outstretched, crying out in fear. I dropped my tire iron clanking on the floor and crouched to scoop her into my arms. I was shoved violently from the side. I staggered to my feet, tried to turn again, was shoved again, *went between the slabs*.

Searing pain as the spikes dragged along my unprotected face and hands. Dozens of points ripping at my clothes.

I had seen my death on TV.

Little Emmy sat on the floor like a sack of potatoes. She was silent, drooping, no resistance in her, petrified by her terror. The

hulking killer stood above me, laughing. "You thought you could beat *me*?"

"I *will* beat you," I said.

But he already had turned away to activate the mechanism. I was counting on that, shifting inside my ridiculously outsized trenchcoat. Painful points dragged across my flesh, but they were blunted by the heavy cloth. Shifting, working my arms out of the sleeves.

He pulled the lever. And laughed.

He didn't understand.

He had always known about me, but thanks to my Emmy I knew all about him, too. My beloved Emmy.

Rumbling, the great marble slabs began to shift, closing almost imperceptibly. I shrank, exhaled—if they entered me deeply enough to hold me, I was through. Already I could feel blood running. I was being skewered alive. But he had stepped closer, right in front of those gaping jaws of death.

He sneered, "You will die, and I—"

"Will die," I said. "I can live without you, but you—"

Enraged, he reached in to grab the front of my shirt. "What do you mean? I—"

I twisted out of the coat, dropped flat under the spikes, shoved his feet, *hard*. He tumbled forward between the slabs.

He cried out, spikes raking him. I was free! I turned back, cocked a leg, kicked with all my strength.

He screamed. The spiked jaws, closing inexorably, held him. Slowly, excruciatingly, one of the spikes pierced his outflung hand, came out the back of it. Blood. His mouth was open, he was screaming hoarsely.

I watched only a moment longer, then turned away and scooped up little Emmy in my arms. She would be all right. Bleeding from a dozen gashes, I went back out the sunken entrance and across the soggy lawn toward the distant lights and warmth of the mansion.

I think I fell a few times. I think I was crying.

But, finally, I was whole.

I opened my eyes in a sun-washed hospital room. My beloved Emmy stood beside the bed, watching me with loving eyes. She bent and kissed me. Her hair smelled of floral shampoo. She stepped back and looked at me and smiled. Grinned, rather. And paraphrased Marlowe in *The High Window*—the only private-eye novel she'd ever read.

"In your part of town you're a pretty good man and if the business got made out of Tony instead, it would be strictly on the house. No profit."

I gave her back Pietro Palermo's lines, out of the side of my mouth as befitted a man who ran a funeral home and several rackets. "That's good. Tony. One funeral—on the house."

She kissed me again, longer, deeper this time. Then we talked. She had gotten there just after they found me on the rain-swept lawn with little kidnaped Emmy in my arms.

"You're a hero now, darling," she said. "Just as you always knew you would be. You were right and I was wrong."

"No—you were right. Terribly right. The kidnaper—"

"Escaped. But she got her daughter back, so—"

"The daughter was *you*, Emily. As a little girl. Somehow I broke through time to the *first* kidnaping twenty years ago. You were the Plummers' infant daughter and it was mixed up with—"

She shook her head. "Danny darling, you ought to rest."

So I told her all of it, from the beginning right down to the closing jaws of that deadly torture machine.

"But there was nobody in it!" she cried. "No body, no blood, nothing to indicate—"

"That's because he was—" I took a deep breath "*—me.*"

"Danny—"

"My dark side. My shadow side. A massive projection just like you told me. So strong that after the fight I—I had to save you from *me*. I had to kill that part of me so it could reintegrate and—"

She burst out laughing. "Don't start with that psychobabble again. You're not one of my patients."

She didn't believe a word of it.

That's okay. We don't want any part of the Plummer millions. It's enough to know that I'm right. And whole.

I've started working out on the weight machines and I'm developing muscles. I'm doing a little sparring, too, and working with the heavy bag. I start karate-training next week. I don't wear my horn-rims any more—no contacts, either. Don't seem to need either one of 'em.

As for our love life, well—who needs a blonde bombshell when you've got Emmy?

Meanwhile, the rescue of the little girl in Plummerton got a lot of ink, even in the Twin Cities papers. They never caught the kid-

naper—you and I know why, pal, don't we?—but my phone has started ringing. This morning it was one of the big agencies in Minneapolis. They'd seen me on the *Today* show and wanted to know my rates.

"Five hundred a day plus expenses," I growled at the guy. My voice has deepened in recent weeks and I've had to start shaving twice a day.

"That's damned steep, Durant."

"So don't pay it, pal—you think I give a damn?"

The words hung on the wire between us. Then he said, in a sort of wondering voice, "My God, you're a hard man, Durant. You rescued that little girl, so I thought—"

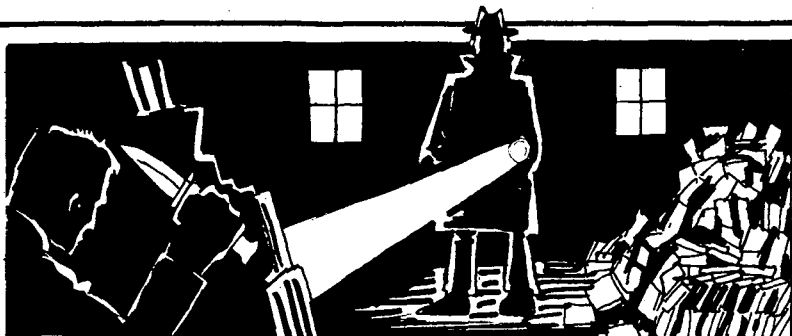
"You thought wrong," I snarled. Then Phil Marlowe's words came to me. "If I wasn't hard, I wouldn't be alive. If I couldn't be gentle, I wouldn't deserve to be alive."

They're sending me the case. It's a big one.

A wandering daughter job.

My meat.





WAREHOUSE SALE

Our warehouse is full—full of classic back issues of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* and *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. That's why we're having our first warehouse sale. For only \$9.95 plus postage and handling, we will send you an assortment of 10 classic issues of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* or *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. That's less than \$1.00 per issue, an unprecedented savings.

Please send your check or money order (no COD's please) to:

Warehouse Sale
Davis Publications, Inc.
P.O. Box 40
Vernon, N.J. 07462

Please send me

- _____ An assortment of 10 issues of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* (\$9.95 plus \$3.50 postage and handling).
- _____ An assortment of 10 issues of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* (\$9.95 plus \$3.50 postage and handling).

Please send to

Name _____
(Please Print)

Address _____

City _____ St _____ Zip _____

While we cannot accommodate requests for specific issues, we guarantee that you will be delighted with your surprise assortment and will enjoy discovering new stories and authors. Also, at this great price, these back issues will make wonderful gifts for your mystery-loving friends.

Available in U.S. only.

All 10 issues will be delivered to you within 6 to 8 weeks.

MVKQ-3

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

In his landmark 1941 history *Murder for Pleasure*, the great mystery critic (and *EQMM*'s first) Howard Haycraft advised beginners in the art of detective fiction, "Avoid the locked-room puzzle. Only a genius can invest it with novelty or interest today." The genius he had in mind was, of course, John Dickson Carr, another *EQMM* reviewer who would continue to produce fresh variations on the impossible crime for another thirty years. (For the first volume in a collected edition of Carr's short fiction, see the recent *Fell and Foul Play*, edited and introduced by Douglas G. Greene and published by International Polygonics at \$19.95.)

Subsequent events have proven Haycraft's implied forecast of the locked room's demise happily mistaken. In recent years, such writers as Richard Forrest, Bill Pronzini, Francis Selwyn, Herbert Resnicow, and John Sladek have given continuing life to the favorite situation of Carr and Clayton Rawson, and the current crop brings forth still more examples.

One of the best and most prolific of contemporary impossible-crime specialists, Edward D. Hoch, has not included one of his own such tales in the latest (1990) entry of *The Year's Best Mystery and Suspense Stories* (Walker, \$18.95), but he has included two by other writers. Jack Adrian's "The Phantom

Pistol" tells of the impossible on-stage shooting of a magician in 1912 London, while Elizabeth Peters' "The Locked Tomb Mystery" casts Amenhotep Sa Hapu as sleuth in ancient Egypt. (These are not the highlights of the book, however. The collection, with half its fourteen entries from *EQMM*, is an uncommonly strong one, highlighted by Donald E. Westlake's hilarious Edgar winner "Too Many Crooks," a Dortmund misadventure that first appeared in *Playboy*; James Powell's equally impressive *EQMM* Readers Award winner "A Dirge for Clowntown," Ruth Graviros' (Eleanor Sullivan's) haunting Edgar nominee "Ted Bundy's Father," and strong stories from these pages by Antonia Fraser, Ruth Rendell, and Henry Slesar.)

The locked room or impossible crime lives on in a trio of new novels as well.

*** Michael Bowen: *Washington Deceased*, St. Martin's, \$15.95. Bowen, one of the most promising detective-story classicists to debut in the last couple of years, introduces a formidable Great Detective candidate in diplomat Richard Michaelson. Frietchieburg Correctional Facility, the federal prison where former Senator Desmond Gardner is incarcerated, may be minimum security, but the watchdog measures are sufficient to make the murder of a fellow inmate in a locked supply room appear im-

possible. Gardner's college-student daughter helps Michaelson negotiate the intricacies of Washington society as well as the who- and howdunit plot.

*** P. M. Carlson: *Murder in the Dog Days*, Bantam, \$3.95. In her 1975 case, pregnant Maggie Ryan visits the town of Mosby, Virginia, and helps solve the locked-room murder of a local reporter. The puzzle and its solution are clever enough, but the relationships of the characters, notably a female cop not yet over her experiences as a Vietnam nurse, give the book its distinction. It's interesting that women writers have given some of the strongest depictions in mystery fiction of the impact of the Vietnam era on its survivors: see also Sharyn McCrumb's *If Ever I Return*, *Pretty Peggy-O*, reviewed here in the Mid-December 1990 issue.

*** William L. DeAndrea: *Killed on the Rocks*, Mysterious, \$17.95. Network troubleshooter Matt Cobb visits the Adirondack estate of corporate raider G. B. Dost and confronts not a locked room but that other tantalizing impossible-crime variant: the murdered body surrounded by unmarked snow. The author is in good joke-making and puzzle-spinning form. (For one of Carr's variations on this situation, writing as Carter Dickson, see the 1934 Sir Henry Merrivale case, *The White Priory Murders*, International Polygonics, \$5.95.)

*** Ed McBain: *Three Blind Mice*, Arcade/Little, Brown, \$18.95. Matthew Hope, defense lawyer of Calusa, Florida, is in good form in this latest case, representing a wealthy

farmer accused of the murder of three Vietnamese who may have raped his wife. If you're a fan of the Queenian puzzle, see what you can do with the very clever (and very fair) license-plate clue.

*** George C. Chesbro: *In the House of Secret Enemies*, Mysterious, \$18.95. This gathering of the ten short stories about Mongo Frederickson, the remarkable dwarf circus performer, criminology professor, and private eye, is most welcome, though it shows pretty conclusively that the character works better at novel length. All but one of the stories appeared in the Seventies in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* or *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*. No less than four of them were cannibalized into Chesbro's 1979 novel, *An Affair of Sorcerers*. The author offers an enlightening Introduction and some good notes on the individual stories.

*** L. Ron Hubbard: *Fear, Bridge*, \$16.95. I never expected to review a book by science-fiction writer and Scientology prophet Hubbard, but this nightmarish tale of ethnology professor Jim Lowry, recently returned from Yucatan with a case of malaria, definitely belongs to the mystery/suspense genre. In the beginning pages, you may feel sure the laudatory comments of writers like Stephen King and Ray Bradbury are exaggerated, but the end of the novel, which first appeared in the pulp magazine *Unknown* in 1940, packs an undeniable wallop.

** Fredric Brown: *The Water Walker*, Dennis McMillan, 729 S. 3rd West, Missoula, Montana

59801, \$35.00. Based on the not-in-defensible proposition that Brown is such a significant figure in the history of detective and science fiction that all his work should be made available, publisher McMillan has now published seventeen volumes (with two more still to come) of Brown's short stories, most from pulp magazines, some (like the grim two-page title story here) not previously published. After so many volumes, is McMillan scraping the bottom of the barrel? Yes and no. Certainly the best things in the book are relatively familiar magazine versions of two of Brown's novels, the powerful mystery "The Wench Is Dead" and the s.f.-satire "Martians, Go Home." But the other stories, two from a religious periodical called *The Layman's Magazine* and eighteen short-stories in the "Feedum & Weap" series from *Feedstuffs*, are fascinating relics of a lost era of American popular fiction.

The latter series casts feed-store delivery man Ernie as small-town detective, solving mysteries non-criminuous but nonetheless baffling in a fictional world that seems as remote as radio's *Lum 'n' Abner*.

The best of them explains why a farmer's twelve hens have suddenly begun producing a daily three dozen eggs. (Given the archival nature of the series, I guess it's acceptable that two of the stories recycle the same plot, explaining how a cat's pawprints got on the ceiling, but editorial notice of the fact would have been appreciated.) Like the others in the series, this is a numbered limited edition (425 copies), but unlike most it lacks an Introduction by and signature of a mystery celebrity.

An enjoyable bedside browsing book for mystery and true-crime fans is *The Mystery Book of Days* (Mysterious, \$15.95) by William Malloy, who finds one or more notable criminous events for nearly every date on the calendar.

Among the reprints is Henry Cecil's 1966 novel *The Asking Price* (Academy Chicago, \$4.95), possibly the only one of the British satirist's books never to get into court. For a much different American legal satirist, try Wilson Schoonover's *Wilkes: His Life and Crimes* (Ballantine, \$8.95), the entertaining exploits of a flamboyant New York defense attorney.

© 1991 by Jon L. Breen.

"Q"

a **NEW** short story by

PATRICK IRELAN

"Come on, come on," the man said, "it won't hurt you. You'll never find an easier job than this."

Danny inched forward, took the money, and backed quickly away.

"There," said the man, "that wasn't so bad, was it? Bring me back fifteen dollars and I'll let you do it again. Just don't tell anyone where you got the money. Okay . . . ?"

NEW MONEY

by PATRICK IRELAN

Hey, kid," said the man on the park bench, "wanna make some money?"

Danny looked at the man cautiously. His mother had told him to be careful around strangers. But she had also told him that someday he'd be old enough to earn money for the family. Maybe he was old enough now. "What do I have to do?" he asked, keeping his distance.

"It's easy, real easy." The man had short brown hair and a round face. He wore a baggy suit, but no tie. "See this twenty-dollar bill? You just take it and buy something—anything you want, just as long as it doesn't cost over five dollars. Then you bring me back fifteen dollars in change, and you keep whatever you bought and any money that's left over."

"I can buy anything I want?"

"Sure. Anything you want."

"And all I have to do is give you back fifteen dollars?"

"That's it. See, I told you it was easy." He held out the twenty-dollar bill. "What do you say?" Danny hesitated. "Come on, come on, it won't hurt you. You'll never find an easier job than this."

© 1991 by Patrick Ireland.

Danny inched forward, took the money, and backed quickly away. "There," said the man, "that wasn't so bad, was it? Bring me back fifteen dollars and I'll let you do it again. Just don't tell anyone where you got the money. Okay?"

"Okay," said Danny. He walked out of the park and stopped on the sidewalk to inspect the twenty-dollar bill. It looked brand new. It was as clean as his mother's best tablecloth, and it didn't have a crease in it.

He put the money into the pocket of his jeans and walked down the street to an ice-cream store. "What can I get you?" said the young woman behind the counter.

"A chocolate shake," said Danny.

The woman made the shake and set it on the counter. "That'll be a dollar seventy-five," she said. Danny took out the twenty and handed it to her. She rang up the sale and put the money into the cash drawer. "Here you go," she said, giving him his change.

Danny sat down at a small round table and counted the money. He had fifteen dollars for the man in the park and three twenty-five for himself. This really *was* an easy way to make money.

He drank his chocolate shake, then walked back to the park. The man was still sitting on the same bench. "How'd it go?" he said.

"Fine," said Danny.

"You got my fifteen dollars?" Danny handed him the money. "Good boy," said the man. "You wanna do it again?"

"Sure," said Danny. He couldn't wait to see how surprised his mom would be when he gave her all that money.

"Here's another twenty for you."

Danny took the twenty-dollar bill. Like the first one, it was brand new. He looked at the picture on the back. The grass in front of the White House was as green as the grass in the park.

"There's just one thing," said the man. "Don't go back to the same place. Never go to the same place more than once a day."

"Are we going to do this again tomorrow?" said Danny.

"You bet. This is an important job."

Danny walked out of the park and down the street to another ice-cream store, where he bought another chocolate shake. Halfway through it, he began to feel stuffed. He left the unfinished portion behind and went back to the park.

"Ready to go again?" the man asked after pocketing his fifteen dollars.

"I don't think so," said Danny. "I have to go home. But I'll come back tomorrow after school if you want me to."

"Sure. You bet. You run on home, and I'll see you back here again tomorrow. And remember, don't tell anyone where you got the money."

As Danny walked away, he looked back over his shoulder. The man was handing another boy a twenty-dollar bill.

"Where'd you get all that money?" said Danny's mother when he handed her the two quarters and six dollar bills. She had just gotten home and still had on her white uniform. Danny's three-year-old sister coaxed the money out of her mother's hands and began playing with it on the floor.

"At the bus depot," said Danny, "carrying people's things for them." He wished he didn't have to lie to his mother, but the man had said not to tell.

"I'm glad to have it, Danny, but I'm not sure I want you hanging around that bus depot." Danny's sister jumped up and ran into the apartment's only bedroom.

"It's okay, Mom. There's a policeman right there all the time." His mother stood with a hand on her cheek. Her skin was as fair as his. Her hair was as dark. Her eyes as blue. "A big policeman," he added. His sister ran back into the room with her panda bear and began teaching it how to count money.

"Well, I suppose it's all right if there's a policeman there. But be careful, Danny. And thank you for the money." She bent down and gave him a big hug.

The next day, Danny went back to the park right after school. "Remember," said the man on the park bench, "don't go to the same place more than once a day, and don't tell anyone where you got the money. I don't want someone stealing it."

For his first stop of the afternoon, Danny selected a drugstore, where he bought a dozen pencils and a large eraser. Walking back to the park, he thought about just how easy this job was. It was, in fact, too easy. The man was handing out money for almost nothing in return. If he wanted change for his twenty-dollar bills, why didn't he buy things for himself and keep *all* the change? Danny decided to ask and find out.

"That's a good question," the man said after taking his fifteen dollars, "a real good question. You see, I work for the government,

and it's my job to put new money into circulation and take old money with me and burn it. Otherwise all the money that people use would wear out, and they wouldn't have anything to buy stuff with. You see what I mean?"

"Yes," said Danny.

"So, you see, this is a real important job, and I need all the help I can get. If it wasn't for people like you and me, the stores would all go out of business. The whole country would just fall apart."

With this explanation in mind, Danny worked until almost four-thirty. Altogether, he put eighty dollars' worth of new money into circulation, saving four businesses from the danger of old money. When he got home, he gave his little sister twelve new pencils, a large eraser, a Big Chief tablet, and a package of stickers. He gave his mother a new comb, a quart of milk, and eight dollars in cash.

"My word," said his mother, "are you sure you're not working too hard at that bus depot?"

"Don't worry, Mom," he said. "It's easy. It's just like helping you carry the groceries."

For the next two weeks, Danny went to the park every day right after school. When he arrived a little past three, the man was always waiting on the same park bench. Two older boys were also working for the man. Like Danny, they usually went home around four-thirty.

Then one day, school let out an hour early. When Danny reached the edge of the park, he saw the man walking into the woods behind the bench where he usually sat. Danny walked over to the bench and waited about five minutes. When the man didn't come back, Danny went into the woods to look for him.

He was walking quietly through the trees when he heard a noise. He crept forward and peeked around a tree. The man was kneeling on the ground, but he was not praying. He was pulling a canvas bag out of a hollow log. Something made Danny wish he hadn't followed him into the woods.

The man reached into the canvas bag, took out a handful of money, and shoved the bag back into the log. Then he put the money into his pockets and walked out of the woods.

Danny waited until the man was out of earshot, then left the woods by a different route. After going halfway around the park, he walked over to the man's bench from the usual direction.

"You're early today," the man said cheerfully.

"They let us out early," said Danny. "The teachers are having a meeting."

"That's good. That'll give you more time to work, won't it?"

"Uh-huh." Danny looked at the man for a moment. "Do you keep your money in a bank?" he said.

"A bank? Oh, no. I wouldn't put it in a bank. Banks aren't safe. It's too easy to rob them. I hide all the money I use where no one can find it. That's what you have to do when you work for the government." He handed Danny his first twenty-dollar bill of the day. "Stay away from banks," he said. "You never know what's gonna happen in a place like that."

Every day, Monday through Friday, Danny brought some money home for his mom. In addition to that, he brought one or more things home for his little sister—things such as crayons, stickers, paints, toys, or books. It was an agreeable routine, and everyone came to expect it.

Then one afternoon Danny arrived at the park and the man wasn't there. He thought about looking in the woods, but he didn't want to discover any more secrets. The two older boys arrived and stood around for a while. But they soon grew impatient and took off in opposite directions.

Danny stayed until almost four, then walked home. He told his sister and his mother that all the people at the bus depot had wanted to carry their own things that day. His sister moaned and said, "Not fair!" Then she turned and stamped away, her ponytail bouncing with each step.

His mother just looked at him. "That's strange," she said, "after all the other times." Danny didn't try to explain.

He went back to the park again the next afternoon, but the man was nowhere in sight. Neither were the other two boys. Danny waited half an hour before leaving. When he got home, he said that not many people were riding the buses that day. His sister said, "Stupid people!"

His mother stood there with a look of uncertainty on her face. "Danny," she said, "you're not doing anything to get in trouble, are you? You know I can't follow you around all day."

"No, Mom," he said. "I'm not getting in trouble."

The next day was Saturday. That morning, as he was playing in the yard, Danny saw one of the two older boys riding down the street on a bicycle. He ran out to the curb to stop him. "What do you want?"

said the boy. He was at the age when talking to younger children is viewed as a great burden.

"What happened to the man with the new money?" said Danny.

"You mean you don't know?"

"No."

"They sent him back for parole violation."

"Oh." Danny had no idea what "parole violation" meant.

"Yeah, possession of firearms."

"When's he coming back?"

"Not for a long time."

"How long?"

"I don't know. Not for a long, long time." He put his right foot on the pedal. "They say he's working in the laundry." The boy laughed and took off on his bike. Danny watched him until he disappeared around the corner a block away.

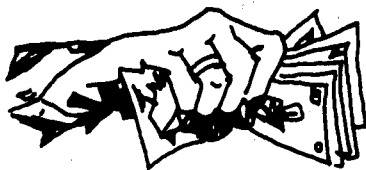
After school the following Monday, Danny hurried out the door and walked straight to the park. He stopped beside the familiar park bench and looked around. No one was in sight. He walked into the woods.

He'd thought about it all weekend, ever since talking to the boy on Saturday. His mother needed money. He needed chocolate shakes. And his sister needed all kinds of stuff.

Besides that, it was his duty. He didn't know when the man would come back, but people had to buy things right now. He couldn't just let all the money in town wear out.

He stopped beside the log and got down on his hands and knees. He reached inside, grabbed the canvas bag, and pulled. It wasn't easy. The bag was stuffed with money. New money. Enough to last for years.

With four twenty-dollar bills in his pocket, Danny walked back out of the woods. There was still no one around. He stopped beside the park bench and surveyed the flowers, the bushes, and the blue sky. It looked like a two-shake afternoon. He walked out of the park, stopped at the first ice-cream store, and went to work.



a **NEW** Polly and Wallis MacDougal story by

JAMES POWELL

Polly MacDougal shook her head wearily and gathered together the pages of her latest mystery story. She wondered if the young readers of Hard-Boiled Humpty Magazine were as bone-tired of her rabbit detective as she had suddenly become. The thought made her a bit guilty. Among her principal characters, H. H. Hopp most resembled her husband who, since his retirement from the faculty of Simon Cameron University, had become something of a borough Sherlock, a solver of the humble mysteries of small-town life. Had she, then, grown tired of her husband? she wondered.

The second in a new series from James Powell, which began with "The Doors of Spring" in the September 1989 issue. In our January issue this year, Jon L. Breen rejoiced in the new—and first—collection of stories by James Powell: A Murder Coming, edited and introduced by Peter Sellers (Yonge & Bloor, 696 Yonge Street, Suite 606, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4Y 2A7, \$14.95). "The volume," said Mr. Breen, "should rank as a classic, natural inclusion in Queen's Quorum if that list of the most important volumes of detective short stories were continued to the present . . ."

THE BALTMAN BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

by **JAMES POWELL**

At a bend in the path, Woodrow Woodchuck in his sleek overcoat and H. H. Hopp, his jaunty fedora stuck between his long furry ears, stopped and looked back at the little wildlife community of

© 1991 by James Powell.

Forest Glen. Woodrow always liked this prospect of an autumn evening, with a cozy light twinkling from every doorway and all the cellars plump with nibble for the winter. How glad he was to have this terrible day of blackmail and revenge behind him and the yellowing bundle of love letters which sparked it all resting securely in his pocket.

Hopp interrupted these mellow thoughts by offering his pocket flask. When Woodrow declined it, the private eye took a healthy slug of Wild Carrot, his beloved amber liquor distilled from the fermented root of Queen Anne's lace. Then both animals resumed their walk.

"Like I was saying, old buddy," said the gravelly voiced Hopp, "Widow Badger knew we'd search her place. And the letters were too bulky to keep on her person. It didn't take an Einstein to figure she passed them on to her old crony, Miss Possum." He added with a wink, "That was real nice back there, your offering to put up her storm windows."

"A fellow likes to help the ladies who find themselves all alone in the world," said Woodrow.

"And she's a real looker, too," said Hopp as they reached the gate of his residence at 22B Bunny Drive.

"As possums go, yes," acknowledged his companion. "But, dash it all, Hippity, we searched her house, too. How did you ever guess she'd hidden the letters where she had?"

"Put yourself in Miss Possum's place," said Hopp. "There you are, North America's only marsupial, right? And your numero uno friend, Widow Badger, asks you as a big favor to hide something for her where nobody will ever find it. Wouldn't you slip it into your pouch?"

Woodrow shook his head with admiration, clasped his friend's hand warmly, and started homeward with a light step and a lighter heart.

There was a twinkle in Hopp's eye when he turned with his hand on the gate and called after him, "And, hey, come first frost don't forget you promised you'd pick Miss Possum's brussels sprouts for her."

Polly MacDougal shook her head wearily and gathered together the pages of her latest mystery story. She wondered if the young readers of *Hard-Boiled Humpty Magazine* were as bone-tired of her rabbit detective as she had suddenly become. The thought made her

a bit guilty. Among her principal characters, H. H. Hopp most resembled her husband who, since his retirement from the faculty of Simon Cameron University, had become something of a borough Sherlock, a solver of the humble mysteries of small-town life. Had she, then, grown tired of her husband? she wondered as she pulled her large frame out of the wooden swivel chair and went into the kitchen to check on dinner.

Through the window at the sink, she saw the stoop-shouldered figure of Wallis MacDougal finishing up his gardening down by the back fence. Watching him wipe his brow with the crook of an elbow, she decided it wasn't really Wallis she was tired of. It was H. H. Hopp, with his nose twitch, fedora, and two-fisted way. It wasn't a fresh husband she needed, it was a fresh detective.

Here Wallis began scraping the dirt from the blade of the shovel with a trowel. Just the sight of metal on metal set Polly's teeth on edge and she looked away. That was when she saw Wes Baltman, their neighbor across the alley, trying to rescue a small grey cat from the crotch of the mulberry tree. The man was balanced high in the air—standing, she assumed, on a stepladder hidden by the hedge. So when the cat scampered out of reach along a tree limb, Polly was startled to see Baltman stride across the empty air, capture it, and drop out of sight.

Recently there'd been talk that the family inherited the ability to float from Jacob Baltman, an itinerant artist who specialized in bird's-eye views. These detailed, almost three-dimensional representations of towns and cities drawn as if seen from a point high in the air were popular in America in the late Nineteenth Century. The artists who made them sometimes added to the mystery of their craft by claiming they had learned to float—a trick, they said, going all the way back to the great ceiling painters like Michelangelo.

The sound of an engine interrupted Polly's thoughts. In a cloud of black smoke, the Baltman van drove into sight from behind the hedge and parked in their back driveway. The man had used the roof of the van to rescue the cat. Shaking her head at her credulity, Polly returned to the living room. On the way, she wondered if her new character couldn't be a floating detective, something flitting about among the flowers in a striking tiger-skin swallowtail coat, solving garden-variety crimes.

She'd just dismissed the idea when her husband came in, bringing with him a hint of the cool, grey autumn afternoon.

"Here's something you can use," he assured her. "I was replanting

the tulip bed there at the fence. So along came little Wade Funk, as solemn as an owl and on his way to meet his grandfather at the barbershop." One stop on the MacDougal's after-dinner walks in the early part of the week had been Cloyd Rutt's barbershop, its lights ablaze and windows open for ventilation, while Enoch Funk painted the interior woodwork, including the old wainscoting and chair-rail all around. "Anyway, Wade watched me working the bone meal into the soil for a bit. Then he said, 'My grandmother makes corn bread with corn meal.' 'That's real fine, Wade,' I said, wondering what sparked that. Then he nods at the bone-meal bag and asks, 'Is that what Fee-Fi-Fo-Fum makes his bread with?' "

Wallis MacDougal looked at his wife expectantly. Then he said, "It's the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk. 'Fee-Fi-Fo-Fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman. Be he alive or be he dead, I'll grind his bones to make my bread.' Bone meal. Get it?"

"I got it," she said wearily.

He said, "I thought you could use it."

"Kids don't want to read about cute kids," she replied.

Wallis cocked an eyebrow to judge just how bad her mood was before asking, "No calls?" For over a year now, he'd pursued a particularly fine Pennsylvania Dutch corner cupboard with its original paint for their antique shop out front. Mrs. Hutchins, its very old owner, had promised to give her decision around the end of the week. Wallis, convinced she was going to sell, had been virtually house-bound since Thursday waiting for her call. Yesterday he'd said, "Boy, Jonathan Swift hit it right. Living in suspense is a miserable thing. It's a spider's life."

"No calls," said Polly.

It was only then that he glanced down at the manuscript she'd handed him. "The Revenge of the Pumpkin People," he read. "That sounds right down my alley."

As her husband settled down with the manuscript, Polly found herself thinking about Wade Funk's grandfather Enoch, and in spite of herself she had to smile. People always smiled when they thought of Enoch Funk. If they found a toothmark on a piece of wax fruit in the bowl, they'd smile remembering the last time Enoch came to call. When they emptied the wastepaper basket, they'd remember when Enoch got his foot caught in it. And every time they saw the FUNK CONTRACTING—NO JOB TOO SMALL sign on somebody's lawn, they'd remember the time Enoch accidentally jackhammered right through the hose to his air compressor or knocked down the ladder

on that shingling job and was marooned up there on the roof until his son came along with the rest of the kids heading home after school.

Enoch was always the first to laugh at his little misadventures. Perhaps that was why White Swan liked him so much. And since he fixed what he broke, cleaned up what he spilled, and dealt honestly with everyone, he always had more work than he could handle. But some of the starch had gone out of him a few years back when his boy finished high school and chose the Air Force instead of coming into the business as Enoch expected. Wallis had observed, "It must be damn hard to look around one day and realize that somewhere back there you lost the respect of your son."

The MacDougals had just finished dinner when they heard the sound of two men shouting across the alley. In a moment the borough police car pulled up, its revolving light flashing in the darkness. Wallis threw down his napkin and headed for the back door, for he liked to keep up on the town's feuds and friendships. But then he said, "Damn it, the minute I walk out that door Miss Hutchins'll call." He looked wistfully in the direction of the argument. Then he looked at his wife.

Polly gave an exaggerated sigh. But she was soon closing the garden gate behind her to join the loose circle of neighbors gathered in the alley to watch the shouting match between Cloyd Rutt, the barber, and Wes Baltman. Officer Darnley, the town constable, was standing between the angry pair, using his body to fend them off as they took turns rushing at each other. Rutt's usually bland face was alive with outrage as he accused Baltman of stealing the bird's-eye view of White Swan that hung in an elaborate plaster-and-gilt frame on his barbershop wall. Baltman denied the charge vehemently, adding, "Anyway, you can't steal what's rightfully yours!"

Polly chose a neighbor she knew dealt in pertinent rather than wholesale gossip to bring her up to date. By that time Rutt and Baltman were breathless from shouting and cocking their fists at each other. So Officer Darnley bundled one into the back seat and one into the front of the police car for a visit to the scene of the crime.

The night had turned chilly. Polly headed back to the house to get her brown cardigan from its peg inside the kitchen door. Filling her husband in on what was going on, she said, "Now the show's moving downtown."

"Why's Rutt so sure it's Baltman?" wondered Wallis.

"The thief had to be able to float," answered Polly, halfway out the door, adding, "Oh, did I forget the part about Enoch painting the barbershop floor this afternoon?" She knew from the way his eyes lit up how badly he wanted to come with her.

Since a bird's-eye-view artist made his money by selling copies of his work to the inhabitants, a small place like White Swan would hardly have been worth his while. But Jacob Baltman had been short of cash and sorely in need of a blacksmith when he arrived in town that day more than a hundred years ago, leading his horse and a listing wagon of the Gypsy-caravan sort. Gilbert Rutt's blacksmith shop was an old barn with a barrel-chested linden tree out front, in whose shade the town loafers sat. Polly remembered the barn. When she was a girl it had been an auto-repair shop with a collection of old license plates nailed up on the inside of the broad doors and a hand-operated gas pump where the linden had stood.

Not being the best blacksmith around, Gilbert Rutt wasn't particularly busy. So he traded Jacob Baltman new springs and metal-work all around for a bird's-eye view of the town. Perhaps he thought it would look good on a calendar to give away to his customers. He got his picture. But on Baltman's way out of town halfway up the grade they call Sleigh Ride Hill, the new ring on the singletree separated. He broke his leg in several places, jumping clear seconds before the wagon demolished itself against a tree.

By the time he shed the hip cast, Baltman had won the heart of Muriel Hoover, the daughter of the boarding-house owners in town who had extended him credit pending a favorable outcome to his damage suit against the blacksmith. Baltman married her and settled down, getting a job as a roofer while his case dragged on in court. Legend had it that he'd sometimes use his floating abilities on small jobs that otherwise would have needed scaffolding.

Several years and as many children later, the Yukon gold rush rekindled Baltman's wanderlust and he disappeared from White Swan, never to be heard of again. Although the Baltmans let the damage suit against Gilbert Rutt peter out, they always claimed the White Swan bird's-eye view the blacksmith had traded for shoddy work'was theirs by right.

Polly knew the picture because every Fourth of July Cloyd Rutt put it in the window of his shop, all decorated with bunting. There White Swan is—longer than it is wide, as befits a canal town—with

River Street bordered by the tops of trees and then the river itself. Down the middle of town ran Market Street. On the distant outskirts, beyond the park and the band shell, were the chimneys of the foundry. (Because of the trees, all you could see of the MacDougal house was the dovecote atop the brick outhouse.) In the middle distance, the spire of the Presbyterian Church stood above the residential rooftops and there, closer to downtown, the Episcopalian spire. The town's brief business district with its fussy brickwork facades occupied the foreground.

As Polly pondered how anyone could have stolen the picture, she came abreast of Enoch Funk and his grandson, who were heading for the barbershop, too. "Cloyd phoned," explained Enoch. "Wanted to know if that bird's-eye-view thing was still hanging there when I locked up. 'I'll say,' I told him."

"Gramps says honesty is the best policy," said Wade. "He says never touch things that belong to others."

Enoch smiled proudly. Two years before, his son's wife had run off with another man. The son had left Wade with his grandparents so he could take a posting overseas. Wade's arrival seemed to give Enoch a renewed interest in life. Grandfather and grandson became a common sight, a solemn pair walking through the town. If people stopped to tell Wade some funny thing his grandfather had done, Enoch would point out that he'd been younger then.

"Why lock the doors?" asked Polly. "Weren't you keeping the windows wide open to air the place out?"

"Right," said Enoch. "But we didn't want anybody forgetful walking in—you know, to borrow a magazine or something—and tracking up the floor. And I hope nobody did. I mean to do the second coat tomorrow morning, then finish off with the black squares evenings during the week." Floors painted with black and white squares were common in the area, dating back to a time when the less affluent aped the marble floors of their betters.

At the barbershop, Rutt was holding forth with much emotion about his loss, the Baltman bird's-eye view being his small claim to fame. As Polly knew, Mr. Tilly, who headed the town museum association, had once offered him a thousand dollars for it and, when Rutt refused to sell, kept after him to donate the picture to the museum. Rutt had basked in the half light of an almost benefactor of the town for a while. But when push came to shove, he always found a reason for holding onto the picture.

"That's where it hung," Rutt insisted, pointing to a nail in the

back wall midway between the back door and the door to the windowless storeroom.

Polly peered inside the shop, trying to fix the layout clearly in her own mind. Wallis went to Rutt and knew the place well. "He makes me feel a kid again," he once said. "The way ears always surprise him reminds me of this barber college my parents sent me to for haircuts on Queen Street East back in Toronto."

The barbershop was small, about twenty-five feet long and twenty feet wide at best, with a ten-foot ceiling. Polly noted the window on either side of the front door. There were two more on each side wall. Between the two on the right was a cabinet with a marble top where Rutt laid out the instruments of his trade and his row of bottles of bright bay rum. The windows on that side were flanked with framed photographs of the heads of handsome young men in more hair styles than White Swan could ever hope to see. A large revolving barber chair stood in the center of the room. Around the room the wainscoting and chair-rail shone with fresh blue paint.

Officer Darnley checked out the paint on the floor just inside the door and turned to display a white fingertip to the crowd. Now he went into a swaying squat. Everyone knew he was checking for the sheen from the wet paint beneath the overhead light. At his nod, indicating the whole floor was wet, a thoughtful hush fell over the crowd.

"You see," insisted Rutt. "It had to be Baltman. He floats. His whole family floats."

"Keep my family out of this," warned Baltman. "Last year my Leo played center for White Swan and the team dredged up that old floating business to give Lititz a scare." (The Lititz Bullfrogs were White Swan's traditional rivals in basketball. The Bullfrog supporters' croaking chant of "Lititz-Lititz-Lititz" when things got critical was viewed by the town as the dirtiest of pool.) "No," insisted Baltman, "people don't float." He looked around at the crowd. "But ghosts do." Everyone fell silent. Wagging a finger, Baltman added, "I say old Jacob Baltman's ghost came from the beyond to take back what's rightfully his."

The crowd murmured and stirred uneasily. Polly noticed Enoch Funk was nodding his head vigorously. "I didn't know you believed in ghosts, Enoch," she said.

"Any port in a storm, Mrs. MacDougal," said Enoch. Polly wasn't sure what he meant by that.

Meanwhile Rutt had decided he didn't like the way things were

going. Seeing Mr. Tilly on the edge of the crowd, he cried out, "Then it's Tilly! Everybody heard him swear he'd get my bird's-eye view for that tin-pot museum of his. 'One way or the other,' that's what he said."

"I meant I'd either get you to give it or I'd buy it from you," insisted Tilly. The crowd agreed with him.

Rutt had run out of ideas. He looked over at Officer Darnley, whose furrowed brow indicated he was still thinking. Meanwhile, the crowd's eyes returned as a man to the nail on the barbershop wall where the picture had hung before the ghost of Jacob Baltman spirited it away.

Polly found Wallis in his easy chair in the living room. When she'd made her report he said, "The important thing is to keep our eye on the ball."

"Which is?"

"Which is the freshly painted floor," said Wallis. "The place's been standing there with its windows wide open. So why did our thief wait until the floor was freshly painted?" He leaned back and stared up at the water stain on the ceiling he used to focus his serious thinking.

Polly sat, elbow on stomach and chin in hand, eyes closed. After a few minutes she said, "Somebody wanted to frame Baltman."

"Could be," mused Wallis without moving his eyes. "Or the ghost of his grandfather."

"Well, I don't believe a living Baltman can float and I don't believe in ghosts," said Polly sharply. "And neither do you," she reminded him. "So how was the picture stolen?"

Wallis sat up and gave her a sly look. "Our thief comes in the side window closest to the back wall," he said. "The one on the left to avoid all those framed hairdo photographs. He steps out onto the chair-rail and heel-and-toes it—"

"Hold it right there," said Polly. "That chair-rail's an inch and a half, two inches wide at most. Nobody's going to heel-and-toe that very far."

"Did I forget the part about the fingers?" asked Wallis, stretching his arms over his head and wiggling his fingers. "The ones he's walking along the ceiling to keep his balance?" When Polly made a face, he said, "Listen, who said it'd be easy? But it could be done. So he makes it to the back door, a good old six-paneled thing with

lots of toe and finger holds. Then it's back up onto the chair-rail. He grabs the picture and goes back the way he came."

Polly didn't conceal her dissatisfaction with this explanation. "Listen," she said, "we're not talking the Mona Lisa or some priceless idol's eye. Who'd go to all that work for a bird's-eye view?"

Her husband thought about that. Then he nodded his head. "You're right," he conceded, leaning his head back and staring at the ceiling again. It was a good five minutes before he straightened up and smiled. "So how about running another little errand?" he asked.

Polly headed back to the barbershop, scowling into the darkness for the first half block, annoyed at her husband for using his damned phone call as an excuse to order her about. She didn't know why he wanted her to look for an opened can of white paint with the lid back on it. And she'd been too proud to ask. Suddenly she smiled. Not one but two new detective characters had just popped into her head, all fleshed out and eager to get to work.

The garage behind the barbershop was closed but unlocked. Polly snapped on the overhead light. Enoch's paint cans and brushes and a stack of folded canvas drop sheets stood in a semicircle of six newly varnished armchairs for waiting customers and a painted magazine rack. Polly took a careful look around. Then she went back home—where she found her husband sitting by the telephone with a bourbon and a downcast look.

"Miss Hutchins prefers not to sell at this time," he said. "Corner cupboards, as she put it, don't eat anything."

"Well, you were wrong about the opened can of paint, too," said Polly, hoping she was telling him something he didn't want to hear. "There wasn't one."

Wallis brightened. "Wonderful," he said.

"But I did find the lid to one," added Polly to take the wind out of his sails.

"Even better," said her husband. He drummed his fingers on the telephone table for a moment. Then he looked up a number in the book and dialed. "Good evening, Cloyd. Wallis MacDougal here. Sorry to hear about your loss . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Well, it's nice of you to say so. Solving little mysteries has become a bit of a hobby of mine. But I have to go along with Wes Baltman on this one. It's the ghost of old Jacob come to reclaim what's rightfully his. What

else can it be? Looks like you've got a haunted barbershop on your hands."

Wallis put the squawking receiver against his chest and, looking very pleased with himself, winked at Polly. Then he spoke into the receiver again. "You put your finger on it, Cloyd. It's going to be very bad for business. Oh, you and I being men of the world can share a tonsorial emporium with ectoplasm, but most people can't stomach the stuff."

He listened for a moment. Then he said, "You know the trouble with ghosts, Cloyd? The trouble is they don't keep up with things. Current events mean little to them. I'll bet old Jacob Baltman's ghost never even knew you were going to donate that bird's-eye view to the town museum, where the whole world could come and admire it. Had he but known, I'll bet he'd have read that as a gesture of reconciliation, a hand reaching out from your side of the grave to his, carrying the message, 'Let's let bygones be—' No, I haven't been drinking, Cloyd, indeed not," said Wallis, holding out his glass and rattling the ice cubes.

When Polly went out into the kitchen to make him another, he raised his voice so she could follow what was going on. "What I'm suggesting," he said, "is you stand up in church tomorrow and announce that if the bird's-eye view is returned you'll donate it to the museum. If Jacob Baltman's listening in, you're going to have one real contrite ghost on your hands. It wouldn't surprise me if he floated that picture right back."

Wallis took a swallow from his fresh drink and listened for a bit. Then he said, "Look at it like this, Cloyd. What've you got to lose?"

Wallis was smiling when he hung up the phone. But when Polly asked what was going on, all he'd say was, "Let's wait and see what the ghost does tomorrow."

"The second coat of white's on," said Wallis cheerily the next morning as he stood at the kitchen window sipping coffee. "There's Wade and his granddad heading home."

Polly said nothing. Ten minutes before, he had announced Wade Funk's appearance in the alley on his way to walk his grandfather back home for lunch. Polly hadn't acknowledged that report, either. In fact, she hadn't spoken more than six words to her husband since the previous night. Now she rose silently from the wreckage of the Sunday *New York Times* strewn on the kitchen table and came to stand directly behind him.

Wallis looked at his wristwatch. "It's Communion Sunday. Time for another coffee before the game's afoot." He turned around to refill his cup and was startled to find his wife standing there.

She poked him in the chest with her forefinger. "Cough it up," she ordered. "What the hell is going on?"

"Everything in due time, my dear," Wallis assured her. "Trust me. I'm trying for dramatic effect here."

"I'm the writer," said Polly. "Let me worry about dramatic effect. You had me running hither, thither, and yon. I want to know why. I want to know it now."

For a moment it looked like Wallis might stand his ground. Then he thought better of it. Clearing his throat, he said, "Remember saying nobody'd go through an ordeal like walking the chair-rail except for something really valuable like an idol's eye? You were right. But it wasn't an idol's eye. It was an idol's reputation."

Nodding at his empty cup, Wallis started toward the coffee. Polly kept nose to nose with him, moving backward, matching him step for step until he could reach the pot. When her husband had refilled his cup, he said:

"Yesterday when he was painting the barbershop floor, Enoch Funk had one of his little misadventures. Somehow or other he painted himself over to the wrong door, the one to the storeroom. So there he was, standing in the storeroom, caught in a dead end of his own making and with his grandson due at any minute. I guess he'd have done anything to keep Wade from finding him there looking like a fool. Poor Enoch had been down that particular road before.

"Well, desperate situations call for desperate measures. Leaving his paint can and brush behind—that's why you found the lid in the garage but no paint can—Enoch got up onto the back of the storeroom door, gave a push, and swung out over the wet paint. When the door touched the back wall, he got up onto the chair-rail. Maybe he slammed the door so Wade wouldn't see the paint can. Maybe it just drifted shut. Anyway, he was carefully heel-and-toeing it, fingers on the ceiling, for the back door when he ran into the bird's-eye view in its big frame. He couldn't get around it, so he unhooked the thing, slung it over his shoulder by the picture wire, and took it along. He probably hid it under a drop sheet in the garage, meaning to hang it back up this morning when he gave the floor the second coat. Too bad Rutt came by to see how the job was going and spotted it missing."

"So when Rutt phoned, Enoch couldn't tell him where the picture

was," said Polly. "He was afraid it would get back to Wade that his wise old grandfather had painted himself over to the wrong door."

Wallis nodded. "Better to let everybody blame it on a ghost."

"Well, shouldn't we get down to the barbershop to see the end of the show?" demanded Polly.

"We've loads of time," said Wallis.

"I don't trust that Cloyd," she insisted. "Suppose he gets there first and hides the picture? He really doesn't want to donate it to the museum."

"It'll be hours before the second coat of paint dries," said her husband. "Cloyd hasn't anywhere near as much at stake as Enoch did. He won't dare the chair-rail route."

When the MacDougals finally got there, they found downtown White Swan abuzz about the return of the Baltman bird's-eye view. The church-going part of the community talked of miracles while the rest favored mass hypnosis, UFOs, or other phenomena they had read about in *The National Enquirer*. Cloyd Rutt was standing at an open window of the barbershop with a beaming Mr. Tilly, who looked like he couldn't wait for the paint to dry. As the MacDougals passed by, the barber gave Wallis the fish-eye. He knew he'd been taken, even if he didn't know how.

On the walk back home, Polly started on her next story, one she intended to submit to *The Mysterious Hornbook*, which catered to young mystery fans of a more literary bent than *Hard-Boiled Humpty Magazine*. She would call the story "The Case of the Floating Dervish" and it would begin something like this:

"On the death of her husband in the Crimea—'His not to reason why, his but to do and die,' remarked the widow to the famous poet who visited the wives of the fallen with a view to celebrating the famous charge in verse—plump little Mrs. Ivy Bumbleby set about to support her brood of hungry young Bumblebys by sending around her card neatly inscribed with the words *Genteel Errands Done*.

"Mr. Loomis Webster, the dealer in old lace whose crooked little shop teeters at the junction of Stinging Lane and Creep Street, soon became her most valuable customer. The air inside his shop tasted as bitter as window panes. Shelves crowded with old lace stood on every side and one atop the other until they disappeared into the darkness beneath the ceiling. But there were none the proprietor couldn't reach instantly by the nimble use of a narrow wooden ladder.

"Mr. Webster never left his premises for fear of missing a chance to buy some fine piece of old lace. Indeed, although his sign read OLD LACE BOUGHT AND SOLD, little that found its way into his shop ever came out again. To support himself, Mr. Webster rented out his considerable mental powers, pondering and unraveling mysterious circumstances of every kind. And, being tethered to his shop by his passion for old lace, he frequently employed Mrs. Bumbleby to assist him in his work.

"On this particular morning, she arrived to find Mr. Webster admiring a collar of Venetian rose-point lace. He greeted her in that muffled voice of his which always made Mrs. Bumbleby think he had just swallowed a large dusty miller moth. 'Dear lady,' he said, 'I have been commissioned by Mr. Pandi, chairman of the London Hindu Council, to explain the disappearance of a priceless moonstone, which until yesterday was the caste mark on the brow of the goddess whose temple stands on Lucknow Terrace.'

" 'First,' said Mr. Webster, handing her a detailed list of his instructions written in a spidery hand, 'I would like you to make certain inquiries into the character of Mr. Achmed Khan, a Moslem gentleman who lives opposite the temple. Mr. Pandi suspects Mr. Khan, who apparently likes to stand at his window calling the temple-goers infidel idolators. Next I would like you to pay yet another visit to the Reading Room of the British Museum to acquaint yourself with a dervish sect to which Mr. Khan belongs. Do they really hold that by fasting and prayer the devout may become so insubstantial as to float in the air?'

" 'Floating dervishes, Mr. Webster?' asked Mrs. Bumbleby. 'But why would you want me to look up such foolishness?'

" 'Ah,' said Mr. Webster, with the ghost of a smile on his long face, 'did I forget the part about the statue being guarded on all sides by a lake of fire made by thousands of small jets of flame piped in by courtesy of the Metropolitan Gas Company?'

So far so good, thought, Polly, taking her husband's arm. Look out, kids. Look out, crime. Here come Bumbleby and Webster!



Another story with a barbershop setting, from a writer new—and most welcome—to our pages . . .

THE HAIRCUT

by **TIMOTHY WATTS**

Robert was cutting a little boy's hair. The kid kept squirming, turning his head every time Robert put the trimmer to his scalp. With his mother sitting ten feet away, watching every move Robert made. Would've pissed him off most days. But not today.

He was waiting for Rachel to stop by. Gonna take her to lunch. So he didn't mind the kid. Finish this one off, maybe a couple of more. Then it would be lunchtime. Robert could be patient that long. Patience was easy. Learned that on the workfarm. Four years of being patient.

Learned how to be a barber at the farm, too. Cut five hundred heads of hair every month, you learn how to use a pair of scissors pretty quick. Got off the farm and came here. The owner, old guy named Jimmy, knew he was a con. Told him he'd give it a try. That had been six months ago. He and Jimmy got along fine.

He kept glancing up at the door. Had a bell over it, let you know when a customer was coming in. The bell wasn't making any noise, but he kept looking at the door anyway. Wanted to see Rachel come in. Giving him that look like he was the only person in the room, making him feel like a school kid.

He had been working there maybe two months when he first met her. She brought her little boy, four-year-old named Billy, in for a haircut, told Robert to make it real short. Tick season coming on, and a four-year-old playing outside all summer long, she wanted to be able to see his scalp. She sat there, giving Robert a long look while he cut Billy's hair. Asking questions, but not prying, like some folks did. Most people, they see a newcomer in town, maybe hear a couple of rumors about him, they come in and stare. He didn't feel that way the day he was cutting her boy's hair, her smiling at him, not even picking up a magazine the way a lot of mothers seemed to do.

© 1991 by Timothy Watts.

Robert figured she was married, having that little boy around. Maybe without the kid, he would've said something, but he didn't. Found out later, though, from Jimmy, that she was widowed. Husband killed a couple of years back in a fire over at the tomato warehouse.

He saw her and the kid a few days later. Coming out of the diner, headed back to work, he almost walked right into them. She was carrying groceries out to her car. He grabbed a sack and walked alongside of her out into the parking lot. He was pretty nervous, it being a long time since he liked a woman, but he got the sense that she was waiting for him to ask. So he did. He'd been seeing her a couple of times a week ever since.

Robert finished with the boy's hair. Took the sheet from around the kid's neck and brushed his shoulders with it. Felt like giving the kid a whack. Maybe go over there and give his mother a whack, too. Saw Jimmy stop what he was doing and wink at him, like he was thinking the same thing. They smiled at each other as Robert gave the woman her change.

There was nobody else ready to hop in the chair, so Robert lit a cigarette and wandered toward the back of the shop. Walked over to the radio and started fiddling with the knob. See if maybe the Braves game was on yet.

The bell above the door gave a jingle. He turned around. Rachel was already inside, talking to Jimmy. She looked up at Robert and gave him a wave.

"Hey," he called. He started to walk over to where they were standing when he heard the bell again. He let his gaze slide past Jimmy and Rachel and looked at the door.

There were two of them. Middle twenties maybe, both with long hair and scraggly beards, not looking like they were there to get their hair cut. Robert heard Jimmy say hi to one of them and saw Rachel out of the corner of his eye start to turn toward the door. Was still watching the two newcomers, thinking he knew what was gonna happen but not sure. Like maybe it seemed bad, but was only in his imagination because he'd done the same thing himself at one time.

But then the second one, still by the front door, reached back and flipped the sign. Turned it around so that the word CLOSED faced out into the street and then pulled the string on the venetian blind. Make it look like Jimmy and Robert had closed up, maybe gone out to get something to eat.

The first one didn't even give Jimmy a chance to speak. Had a gun out and in his face before he made a sound. A .45. The kind of gun Robert might have used. Make a hole the size of a dime going in and one as big as a silver dollar coming out the other side. Stick something like that in a person's face and they were liable to do what you told them.

"Rachel." Robert spoke clearly. She turned toward him, had a look on her face like she was gonna choke. He saw the two men turn also but ignored them.

"Rachel," he said again. This time she answered.

"W-what." Came out like a croak. But he had her attention.

"I want you to come here. Just walk on over and stand next to me, okay?" To the robbers, he said, "You do what you gotta do. We're just gonna stand over here. That way nobody gets in the way of anyone. All right?"

The first one nodded. "That's right. You two just stand there. Real quiet." He pointed at Jimmy. "You, old man. Come on over here and gimme the money out of the register."

Jimmy took a look at Robert like he didn't know what to do, like maybe he was thinking of yelling for help. Robert couldn't tell. Just knew that with a forty-five in your face you didn't go opening your mouth.

"Jimmy," he said, "do what he says."

Jimmy nodded. Took a couple of steps forward, that big gun still sticking in his face. The first robber started to back up with Jimmy, with Robert watching quietly, thinking that it looked like they were dancing, Jimmy and the robber, shuffling along face to face toward the cash register.

"That's it, old man. We'll just borrow some of your cash," the robber said. "Take a loan, so to speak. Nice and easy. And then maybe next week we'll stop by and give it back. Whatta you think?"

"Just take the money, that's all—I don't care," Jimmy told him.

The man with the gun spoke to his partner, still watching Jimmy but speaking loudly. "You hear that? He doesn't care. Maybe not all his money's in the register is what I think."

"It's in there," Jimmy said. "All I got. Ain't a whole lot. Whyn't you just take it, though. Maybe I can go back and cut some hair after you're gone. All right?"

The robber said, "Shut up, old man." He turned to where Robert and Rachel stood. "What about you?"

"I got a wallet. Maybe ten, fifteen dollars in it," Robert said. He nodded his head toward Rachel. "I can't say about her."

"Gimme," the robber said. He held his hand out.

"Okay." Robert lifted his wallet out of his pocket and tossed it onto the floor so it landed at the robber's feet. He turned to Rachel. "Give him your money."

"All right." She started to dig through her purse.

"The whole thing. Hurry," the robber said.

Rachel shrugged, took her purse from around her shoulder, and threw it across the room. The man with the gun caught it one-handed and dumped its contents on the floor. He kicked at the pile and came up with a change purse, which he stuffed in his pocket.

He turned back to Jimmy. "Come on, old man. Hurry it up—" he pushed Jimmy out of the way, reached into the cash register, and grabbed a handful of bills. "Jesus," he said, "is this it?"

"That's all I got," answered Jimmy.

"It's the truth," Robert said.

"What I think," the robber told them, "I think you're both lying. Hoping I'll just walk on out of here with what I got now."

"It's your best choice," Robert said.

"Who the hell are you to tell me that?"

Robert shrugged. Told himself to relax. Maybe this thing would end itself pretty soon.

"I'll tell you what," the man with the pistol said. "I've been watching this place. Nice little business going. Specially on Saturday. I figure you got more money. So maybe I'll take the lady in the back. She and I can talk about it some."

"No," Robert said. "I don't think so."

"Yeah?" The robber turned to the door and spoke to his partner. "Whatta you think? I got time to talk to the lady? See what we got in common?"

His partner looked at the three of them, shook his head. "In and out, that's what you said. Let's get outta here."

The first robber nodded. "All right. Not today." He turned to Rachel. "Maybe some other time I'll stop by—take you out, have a couple of drinks." He laughed, turned away from them, and walked over to where Jimmy still stood by the register. "See you, old man," he said. And then he swung his arm, the hand with the forty-five in it coming up from somewhere down around his waist. The gun caught Jimmy on the side of the head, knocking him back and sending little spots of blood onto the wall behind him.

Robert saw Rachel start to move. He was still looking at where Jimmy had been, but heard her gasp and take a step forward. He grabbed her arm and held her next to him, his fingers digging into the flesh above her wrist. "Stand still," he told her. He himself wanted to go over to where Jimmy lay but knew that's what the robber wanted and looked instead at the man with the gun.

"What about it?" the robber said. "You got something I need to hear? Something you want to tell me?"

Robert shook his head.

"You sure now?" the robber said. "'Cause I got to get going. If you got something on your mind, be better if you told me now."

"I got nothing on my mind," Robert said.

The robber laughed. "That's what I figured." He turned away from them, let them see his back as he and his partner walked out the front door. Robert figured he was making some kind of statement, letting them have a chance without holding the gun on them.

"Call the police," he told Rachel. He walked over to where Jimmy lay on the floor. There was a big lump on his head, blood pouring out. "And an ambulance."

He reached up on the counter behind him and got a clean white towel to hold on Jimmy's head while they waited. He heard Rachel on the phone, then could feel the floorboards settle as she walked up behind him. Peering over his shoulder to look at the mess on Jimmy's face.

"You all right?" he asked. He leaned back so he could look up into her face. Reached up with his free hand and touched her wrist where he'd grabbed it. It was already starting to show a bruise.

"I think so," she answered. "You?"

He looked back at Jimmy lying there with his blood staining the towel and glanced up at the empty cash register and the spots on the wall. "I'll be fine," he said.

He waited three days. Cleaned up the mess at the shop, kept the place open, cutting hair while Jimmy lay in a bed up at the county hospital. Rachel came by twice to see him, but he was too busy to take her anywhere. After work he just went home, sat in his room, and thought things over.

The police weren't any help, said this kind of thing happened all the time. The sheriff gave him a long look, knowing he was an ex-con, and said maybe it was an old friend of his, came over to pay him a visit. Robert told the sheriff probably not.

On the fourth day, Robert made a couple of phone calls. Wanted to get this thing narrowed down and over with as soon as possible. It took some time but he got what he needed in the end. A little bit of information. And a gun.

Friday night, late, he drove down into Statesboro. Had the gun and a long coil of rope in the trunk of his car. Took his time driving down, not in any kind of rush.

He found the place a little after midnight—a little ranch house, pretty beat up, next to a mobile-home trailer park maybe six miles off the Interstate. He pulled into the trailer park and drove around slowly a couple of times, getting closer to the house each time he went by, finally killing the engine and coasting to a stop a couple of doors away. Lit a cigarette and sat there for a while, trying to get a feel for it, see what might be going on over at the ranch house.

After an hour, with no lights going on or off and no sound coming out, he decided the place was empty. He walked on over and broke a pane of glass in one of the back windows. Waiting another bit, he then let himself in.

He prowled around the house for a few minutes. He grabbed two chairs from the kitchen, took them into the living room, and set them back to back so they'd be ready when the robbers came home. He was sitting on the living-room sofa with the gun in his hand when they came in—a .45, like they had used.

It was easier than he'd expected. They came in arguing and he could tell from their voices that they were drunk. They stopped talking when they saw him.

"What the hell you doing?" It was the loud one. The one who had hit Jimmy.

Robert didn't say anything. He cocked the gun instead, the sound of the hammer going back like a piece of wood popping in a fire. The second robber started to speak but Robert guessed he thought better of it because he shut his mouth and stared instead.

"Hey—" the first one said.

"Shut up," Robert told him. He got up off the sofa with the gun in one hand and the coil of rope in the other and walked over to them. He tossed the rope to the first one and stood looking at the one in back. "Tie him up," he said, pointing at the two chairs in the middle of the room.

"If it's the money you want—I mean, we still got some of it. Give you what we got," the second one protested.

"I told you to tie him up," Robert said again. He took a step forward and pushed him. Slowly the two men moved toward the chairs, with Robert backing away, not letting either of them get too close. He watched as the first man took a seat and his buddy began to loop the rope around him.

"It better be nice and tight," Robert told him. When the man had finished and the louder one was pinned to the chair, Robert nodded. "That's fine," he said. He pointed at the other chair with his pistol. "Now it's your turn. I'm gonna sit you down in that other chair and tie you up. It's gonna be pretty tight, but it's gonna feel better than if I shoot you, and that's what I'll do if you give me any trouble. You understand?"

"Yessir," the second robber said. Without asking why, he sat down on the chair.

Robert walked over to the two men. Without letting go of his gun, he tied the second man securely and then double-checked that neither man was gonna be going anywhere.

Satisfied, he stepped back and looked at the two men. Their eyes were wide with fear.

Robert spoke quietly. "The way it used to be," he said, "I'd go into a place—like you went into that barbershop—wave a gun around, try to scare the hell out of everybody so they don't think to do anything stupid, get somebody hurt. If somebody pulled a gun, maybe pointed it at you while you were pointing one at them, well, that was their problem. You follow?"

Both men nodded.

"But you went in, sticking a place up. Gonna take their money and nobody tried to stop you. No reason to go and hurt anyone—hit an old man on the head and maybe kill him."

"We was scared, that's all," the first robber said.

Robert smiled at him. "Hell, boy. You weren't the one was scared. Was that old man who was scared."

Neither of the men said anything. Robert looked at the two seated men and then nodded.

"I'll be right back," he said. He walked out of the house and over to his car, opened his glove compartment and grabbed the little cardboard box he had brought along. Went back into the house and ignored the two men while he searched along the base of the walls for an electrical outlet. When he found one, he plugged his equipment in and walked back to the two men.

"I'm gonna have to gag you," he told them. He reached down and

undid the shoes of the closest man. Pulled off the man's socks and stuffed one in each of their mouths. Then he stood up and smiled at them.

"I want you to know I usually charge eight bucks a shot for this. But this one's on the house."

He flicked the knob on the object in his hand and felt it hum into life. For the next half hour the only sound in the room was the occasional grunt of one of the seated men and the steady buzz from Robert's right hand.

Monday morning early, the sheriff stopped by. Robert was sweeping the floor, getting ready to open up. More or less expecting somebody to come around, he walked on over and let the sheriff in. "Morning," Robert said.

The sheriff walked in and stood with his hands on his belt, looking the place over. "Hell of a thing," he said, "what happened here Saturday. What they did to Jimmy."

"Uh-huh," Robert agreed. He leaned on his broom, letting the sheriff take his time, letting him come around to it in his own way.

"But I guess in a way he was lucky," the sheriff told Robert. "Some folks, they come in and rob your place, get everything they want, and still put a bullet in you. Kill you just for the hell of it."

"I've met some fellows do just that," Robert said.

The sheriff nodded. "On the farm, right?"

"There. And other places."

"Not you, though. You never hurt anyone when you were doing this kind of thing, am I right?"

Robert didn't reply. Waited for the sheriff to continue.

"Yeah," the sheriff said. "I'm right." He paused and studied Robert for a moment. "I looked up your sheet the day after you got out. Convicted of armed robbery. Seven years. Got out in four with good behavior. Does that sound about right to you?"

"That's it, all right," Robert said.

"Uh-huh," the sheriff said. "I like to know who's coming into my town." He turned to walk out and stopped after a couple of steps. "I almost forgot," he said. "They found those fellows that robbed this place."

"Did they?" Robert said.

"Yep. Down in Statesboro. I'll tell you one thing, I've seen some pretty weird things, but this one takes the cake."

"Why's that?" Robert asked.

"Well, these were two pretty rough guys. Always getting in some kinda trouble. And they looked the part. Beards and dirty hair down to their shoulders." The sheriff paused and looked at Robert. "You know what I mean?"

"Sure," Robert said. He nodded. "That sounds like the two boys that robbed this place, all right."

"Oh, it was them," the sheriff said. "Hell, they even confessed. Once we got them untied and down to the station." He waited to see if Robert was gonna say anything. But Robert just stood there and let the sheriff continue.

"It was the damndest thing," the lawman said finally. "Somebody went down there, found these two guys, and tied them up right in their own house."

"Sounds like somebody was trying to do your work for you, maybe save you some time," Robert said.

The sheriff gave him another one of his looks. Stared at him for maybe ten seconds and then said, "Maybe so. Meanwhile, somebody had a little fun with those fellows."

"Did they?" Robert asked.

"Well, it depends upon your point of view. Seems whoever tied those boys up also gave 'em a haircut. But not your normal trim. Looked like somebody went after them with a pair of hedge trimmers. When we got there those boys were balder than newborn eagles. And when we took the gags outa their mouths they went to swearing so loud we had to gag 'em again. Funniest thing I've seen in a while."

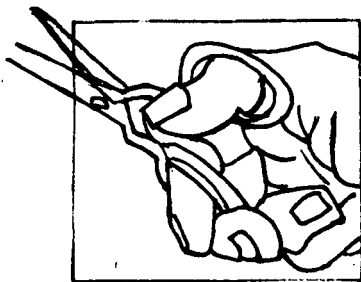
The sheriff stopped talking and looked at Robert for a long time. Finally he said, "I figured, what with you bein' a barber and all, well, maybe you knew somethin' about what happened to those boys."

Robert smiled. "Sheriff, I'm a professional. I don't cut hair for free. Wouldn't be fair to Jimmy. With him depending on me to run the business until he gets better, it just wouldn't be fair."

The sheriff smiled back at Robert. "Yeah," he said, "I guess you're right. Anyway, what with the confession and all, I don't think those fellows are gonna be bothering anyone for a while." He turned and walked to the front door. "I guess whoever cut those boys' hair could've gotten a lot nastier. I mean, they could have done anything to those fellows. I'm just glad somebody had a sense of humor."

Robert gazed after the policeman for a while. Watched him get in his cruiser and pull out into the street. Went back to his sweeping.

Maybe at lunch he'd go up to the county hospital and see Jimmy. Later on he was gonna take Rachel to a movie. He wanted to spend more time with her—and her son. Maybe in time he'd ask her to marry him. Settle down and help her raise that boy. He smiled. It was something he'd never wanted to do before. And there it was, right in front of him.



FIFTY YEARS AGO . . .

April 5: Michael Moriarty born
April 14: Julie Christie born
April 20: Ryan O'Neal born
April 28: Ann-Margret born

a **NEW** Jannie story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

The fourth in Janwillem van de Wetering's new series about Florida Keys-based Taoist guru Jannie, two of which have appeared in EQMM and one in The Third Degree. Jannie doesn't mind it being mostly him when big moral decisions are being made, but it's nice, he thinks, sharing fate . . .

MOSTLY ME

by **JANWILLEM van de WETERING**

Listen," Deputy Sheriff Wacko said, "this was for real. I was all pumped up, adrenaline everywhere. I knew I was in danger, I was *afear*ed." Wacko touched his toothbrush moustache. "The mother was *after* me, Jannie."

"So you didn't have a steady hand," I said.

Wacko laughed. "I missed him twenty-eight times, Jannie. And then I got him in the T-zone.

"You know what the T-zone is?" Wacko asked.

"Two inches wide, spans above eyebrows, intersects in the middle with a line that extends down to the navel," Wacko said.

"Get them there and they're dead," Wacko said.

"I'll tell you," Wacko said, "I don't really know for sure where I got him. But must have been in the T-zone, right?

"Because he *is* dead," Wacko said. "I got him with my twenty-ninth slug. Jeez, Jannie, you should have been there. It was a battle. I kept sneaking around the cruiser and the palm trees and the bushes, and those damned little carbine bullets kept whining, and all the glass in the cruiser got smashed and I kept shouting at Bernie to stop, and firing over his head, and then by and by I started trying to get him—and then I got him." Wacko was sweating. "Got him in the T-zone, Jannie."

© 1991 by Janwillem van de Wetering.

And Bernie missed Wacko fifty-nine times in any zone, I thought. With a carbine. A carbine is a rifle with a short barrel. But a short barrel on a carbine is a lot longer than the barrel on Wacko's service gun.

"Was Bernie drunk?" I asked.

"You're kidding?" Wacko asked, trying to squeeze his pot belly back into his pants. "His car was waving all over Egret Key Avenue. When I put on my blues, he wouldn't stop. When I switched on the siren, he swung off so wide he crumpled up on a royal palm. That should have stopped him, but he came out, anyway, shooting that goddamn carbine." Wacko's white handkerchief polished his bald skull.

I knew Bernie wasn't a problem drinker. I knew Bernie's carbine, I had fired it myself. It's a short plastic rifle, twenty-two caliber, made by a Brazilian outfit under a Remington license. To load the weapon, you unscrew a plastic loading pin in the butt and take it out, then you drop in fourteen cartridges one by one—little things, they are—then you screw the loading pin back again. It's a fiddly job—easy to drop cartridges next to the butt even when there's good light. It's also easy to lose count and drop in too much ammo, in which case you have no weapon for the carbine won't work.

So here we have Bernie, a seventy-year-old man, reloading that little well made precision rifle accurately in the dark several times, and he's *drunk*?

"Wacko," I asked, opening another alcohol-free beer and pushing it across the table on my porch, "did you count the shots?"

"Yes," Wacko said, "like when I shoot basketball, I always count. You know? When we practice."

Wacko and I live across from each other on Egret Key Avenue. Wacko lives with a bunch of raccoons that line up between the Florida bushes every evening for dogfood and I live with Parrot, who imitates the dead neighbor's dead dog: "Arf arf, huh-huh-huh, arf arf." Wacko and I are good neighbors. He comes over in the mornings sometimes and we shoot balls through the basket I have rigged next to my driveway. We keep throwing as long as we score. We play for an hour. The guy with the longest score wins. Loser makes breakfast. Wacko is good at stews on toast. My thing is ginger pancakes.

"I counted the shots," Wacko said. "Both Bernie's and mine. And the detectives out of Key West counted the empty cartridges that were lying about the scene. I got to fifty-nine, counting the number of times the carbine cracked at me, and the detectives counted the

empty cartridges lying around on the tarmac. They got to fifty-nine, too."

"They didn't find any good cartridges?" I asked.

Wacko clacked his dentures. "Why?"

"I'm wondering whether Bernie dropped any cartridges while reloading," I said.

"Bernie *fired* his cartridges," Wacko said. "At *me*."

And Bernie was drunk, I thought, and he didn't drop any of those small cartridges while reloading the carbine.

"Nah," I said.

"Something wrong?" Wacko asked.

We were sharing breakfast and I pushed a plate of pancakes across the table. It was two mornings after the shootout resulting in Bernie's loss of life. Bernie demised at nine P.M. at the end of Egret Key Avenue, near the wastelands—the mangrove swamps where bad bugs breed. Wacko was on patrol in the area, cruising around, looking for couples throwing empties out of their cars, and saw Bernie's white Caddy careering around.

Bernie was a retired fishing-fleet owner from Maine, spending lonely winters here in a palatial home sprawling nearby on the shore of Egret Cove—a little porcupine of a man, but pleasant enough when spoken to politely. I sometimes stop off at his dock when I'm out rowing. We boasted about the few investments we made that went right and drank iced coffee. Last time he showed me the carbine, too.

"Eskimo rifle, Jannie," he said. "Alaska Eskimo takes it out in his kayak, gets it wet, just shakes out the wet, gets it dirty, shoots out the dirt, hits the odd seal he needs to get through the winter. Never misses. Beats bow and arrows."

He set up some cans at thirty feet and I shot each and every one, hitting their dead centers. I'm not really a very good shot, but with the carbine that didn't matter.

Bernie was the last smoker. He dangled an empty pack of Marlboros from a few feet of fishing line attached to a palm frond, took careful aim from quite a distance, hit the packet in its red spot. Good shot.

Bernie missed Wacko fifty-nine times?

"Jeez," Wacko said. "I *knew* the guy. Bad-tempered old codger *lives* here. Why do I have to get an old codger personally known to me in the T-zone, hey?"

Because you wanted to, Wacko, I thought, but I wasn't sure. The

doubt was creeping up. The doubt was saying that it wasn't only Wacko's mind directing his service Magnum .375 that killed Barnie. It wasn't even Giuliano's mind so much. What took out Barnie was probably mostly me.

Why use Wacko as my extension?

Wacko is ahead in ideas. He claims he got himself incarnated on a mad planet by mistake. He says he hates it here. I've told him he hates the planet because his wife moved in with her fat boss in return for an imported sportscar with transmission trouble and a stack of Trump paper, and Wacko says that is so but it's also because of garbage taking over the seas, and the dead eyes of the Mexicans that served him during his last holiday, and TV fundamentalist-preaching, and all the other bad guys that fix the price of oil. Wacko, to symbolize his protest, wants to hit a bad guy. "Just one."

Wacko told me that after he lost on early-morning basketball again.

"In the T-zone?" I asked.

"Right." Wacko walked back to his house across the road to get the book on street survival he sent for out of a law-enforcement catalogue. It showed a picture of a naked man with a beard aiming a gun, and you saw the bad guy's guts and liver and lungs. But that wasn't where to hit him so as to stop the mother—you had to get him in the T-zone, from the forehead straight down the middle: nose, mouth, chest, upper intestine. Wacko said he'd been practicing up on paper targets. He said he got the paper targets good.

I remembered telling Barnie, in between sipping iced coffee and shooting beer cans, that Deputy Sheriff Wacko wanted to take out "just one bad guy" and that Barnie thought that was cute. I told you Barnie was a porcupine of a man. He had hair sticking out of everywhere around his blueberry eyes. He was normally kind of crusty, but Wacko's desire seemed to cheer him.

"Wacko is the guy with the raccoons and run-off wife?" Barnie asked. "Crazy cop that lives in the junk-tower he built himself out of beach stuff floating up?"

I said that was so.

"And taking out just one bad guy would make him feel better?"

I said that was so, too.

"Cute," Barnie said.

"I've seen you on the bridge," he said, "fishing with Giuliano."

I said that was so.

"I hung Giuliano's dog," Bernie said. "In nineteen forty-five. A woolly pooch called Button. Cute little dog. Nice ears. I hung him."

A long pause drifted by, filling up the wide sky above Egret Cove.

"Did Giuliano tell you?" Bernie asked me.

Pelicans were plunging into the cove for fish. A frigate bird planed effortless above us.

"Gives me bad dreams," Bernie said.

Two vultures flapped by.

"So Wacko wants to kill just one bad guy?" Bernie asked. That was a bad moment. If it had been a movie, there would have been some glossy music oozing out of your set's speaker. You know that something nasty is about to happen, events that you're imagining vaguely and that you know the director won't really allow to flash from screen to your poor innocent eyes—but then he does. Trouble with directors is that they don't ask their audience for permission. And trouble with Bernie was that he was asking me for permission. And trouble with me was that I grunted. "Erch erch." Like if I agreed.

Giuliano says I look like his idea of a god. I say I look like a heron. I am tall and thin on spindly legs, with long monkey arms swaying about, and my brow is high and I have lots of long white curls that grow into my guru beard. My voice is bass, which is sort of silly for such an elevated skinny guy. Here on the lower Keys, some sillier folks have made me part of their legend. They project all sorts of insights and magic into my robed form flapping about on retread sandals. Being vain, I've never stopped the imagery that turns sillier folks on. In fact, I add to all that foolishness by rowing about in moonlight, chanting and playing bongos, meditating in a gazebo Wacko built in the shape of a teepee, listening endlessly to people's monologues. Sometimes I grunt.

The grunts are taken for approval. I grunted when Wacko said he wanted to get his bad guy—just one—and I grunted when Bernie volunteered that Wacko's murderous desire was cute. I didn't grunt when Giuliano said he had a bad heart and could croak any minute now and that maybe he should be excused if he let Bernie go. Giuliano was born in a stable on Sicily and a pig sat on his leg and crushed it a bit. He grew up in New York. When World War II started, the partly lame leg kept Giuliano out of the service. All his brothers invaded Italy and fought the fascists while Giuliano kept the family business going by supplying the U.S. Navy off Manhattan

with ladies and liquor. In order to do that, he cut in Bernie, who was with the Coast Guard patrolling the Hudson River.

"So I missed a payment once," Giuliano said, when we were fishing for snapper off Flagler Bridge, "so Bernie warned me. But everything was going wrong and I couldn't find cash. So Bernie warned me again. So next was Button dangling from a rafter on the Tribeca loft I used for working out of."

Dogs are good guys. I agree with Wacko that *Homo sapiens* is evolution's most serious mistake and that dogs are different. Dogs greet you when you come home and snuggle up in your back when your spine hurts and grin sillily after bad barks because the wind is away from them and you're not moving and they think maybe you're the burglar at last and now what?

Dogs shouldn't hang from rafters.

Giuliano retired to Egret Key, too. He got an architect to build him an Ibiza stucco villa. He drives a Rolls. He has a wife who looks like his granddaughter and was a model. She does a good job. Everything is good with Giuliano except his heart that has been bypassed by the best but keeps going wrong regardless. What with all the luxury and the fishing and the sex and the physical problem, Giuliano didn't jump when fate turned up Bernie forty-five years too late.

"I should have taken him out then," Giuliano said, "but the war was over and my brothers needed me in free Sicily to sell surplus to the poor. Bernie got demobbed somewhere and I postponed and *you* know how it goes."

I didn't grunt. Suppose something would happen to Parrot. Suppose I would come home one day and Parrot wouldn't arf and huh-huh-huh but hang from a rafter.

"Bernie used a noose?" I asked.

"One of my own silk ties," Giuliano said. "Bernie thought I was Mafia and that's what Mafia does—horrors, you know? Treat them to what they know. But I never did horrors." Giuliano touched his heart. He sighed.

I've been doing Taoist exercises lately, with burning herbs, and reciting mantras in Chinese, and standing on one leg. The activity is supposed to make you see the dreams of others. I was seeing Giuliano dreaming his way into Mafia heaven and the padrone wouldn't give him a cloud to sit on.

"You wouldn't want to spend eternity standing around with no cloud to sit on," I said.

Giuliano gave me his funny look. Sometimes he would like to replace me, but, as in the case of his lovely wife, too, replacing your environment gets harder with old age. As his only friend, I'm prepared to come over and enjoy his squid sauce on spaghetti, and I drive him to his hospital checkups when Katarina has her massage or *Beauty and the Beast* is on rerun or she is sunning naked on the back porch and the Red Baron tourist plane out of Key West is flying out to see sights.

We left it at that. I wouldn't grunt. I went home quietly. And now Bernie got taken out by Wacko.

There was a missing link somewhere.

The morning after Bernie's suicide, Giuliano was feeling better. He was in his hammock and Katarina walked around on high heels serving fruit juice.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Giuliano tried," Katarina said. "Really, Jannie, he tried, but there was something wrong with the gun."

Katarina never did any of the burning herbs or the mantras or the standing on one leg and she can *still* read my dreams. Maybe it's different for women.

Giuliano uses a Walther PPK, same as James Bond. A Walther is made by Germans the way Germans used to make Walthers. A Walther lies in your hand and you just touch the trigger and *whap!*—into the T-zone. It's the kind of gun that directs itself. You can't miss. Not even bypass-Giuliano could miss.

"Listen," Giuliano said, "it was more than the gun being broke. Listen, Jannie. First of all, there's Bernie turning up here. Why retire on Egret Key? There are lots of keys."

We had been through that before. Giuliano is religious. He believes in the guiding hand, in growth through suffering, the flaming sword, the blind lady with the scales, karmic conclusions. You name it and Giuliano folds his hands and mumbles. Katarina says it's because he's old and his heart is bad.

"So what do I do?" Giuliano says. "I do the right thing. I could have put out a contract but I tried it myself."

"To show he was sorry," Katarina said, serving more fruit juice. "But there was the problem with the gun."

"Please," Giuliano said, "put something on and don't interrupt me. There was nothing wrong with the gun when I left here to do

my duty. I had everything right. Five-thirty in the A.M. Sun wasn't up yet. Nobody around. I took my bicycle, not the car. No sound."

"You got a bicycle?" I asked.

"For training," Katarina said. "He never trains."

"Please," Giuliano said. "A good contract is quick. It's hi—bang—bye."

"No bang," Katarina said.

"No bang," Giuliano agreed. "I said, 'Morning, Bernie'—he was in bed, sitting up, expecting me maybe. An old man, old men wake up early. And I say, 'All set? There you go,' and I pull the trigger and nothing."

"You had the safety on?"

"That's what Bernie said." Giuliano shook his head. "I checked. It was off. I tried again: no click, no nothing."

"Let's see that gun," I said.

"That's what Bernie said," Giuliano said. "So I did that."

I grunted. I could see it now. It was still mostly me but the others played good parts, too, after all. Giuliano wanted my approval for not taking out Bernie for hanging Button (hey, Giuliano is old—hey, Giuliano is sick) and I didn't grunt. Wacko wanted me to back him when he set up his desire to kill "just one bad guy" and I grunted. Bernie wanted my approval for setting himself up for Wacko in case Giuliano kept chickening out and I grunted. So it was mostly me setting off this vengeful course of action, but there's still the chaos backing me up, there's still chance going any which way, there are still gods playing dice.

Proof? The Walther didn't fire. I liked that. I mean, I don't mind being mostly me when these big moral decisions are being made but it's nice sharing fate.

"You gave Bernie the gun that you wanted to shoot him with but it failed you," I said.

"Sure," Giuliano said. "So he fixed it."

"What was wrong?" I asked.

Giuliano shrugged. He explained it was no fault of the gun. A burr on a cartridge rim got the deadly projectile to stick in the breech. Bernie flipped it out and the next cartridge popped up from the clip and fitted fine.

"Bernie gave you the gun back?" I asked.

Katarina nodded. "But then Giuliano couldn't do it any more. Don't you think that's nice?"

I grunted . . .

Giuliano's heart gave in shortly after. Wacko, Katarina, and I sprinkled his ashes into the cove. Do you know that even bad guys' ashes turn pink as they twirl down toward the coral? Wacko got two months off, half of it with pay, and toward the end of his leave a puppy wandered into his yard. The puppy looks like Barnie: porcupinesque, cantankerous, crusty, repressed apologetic but somehow, in its own way and with due reservations, not altogether unloving. Wacko's wild raccoons consented to let Barnie II into their dogfood.

So that's okay. None of us forgave the human Barnie, but if he wants to come back as a dog we'll put up with his new form. When Wacko's on duty, I take the new Barnie boating. He doesn't like it much but it's better than being left alone in Wacko's yard. He's allergic to fleas, but Katarina washes him with medicated shampoo. He doesn't like that, either.

What he does like is visiting Parrot and doing the arf and huh-huh-huh together.



In the Mid-December 1990 issue, we reprinted Georges Simenon's "A Matter of Life and Death," which recounted a tense cat-and-mouse chase through the streets of Paris—offstage, as it were, from a police station. "Blessed Are the Meek" also recounts a suspenseful chase—this time through the streets of a small French town, with all the terror and atmosphere for which the author came to be celebrated.

The story, as Ellery Queen said, creates "a mood which catches the reader's imagination in the first two paragraphs and holds it to the very last line—and even beyond, for this story will remain fixed in your memory . . ."

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

by GEORGES SIMENON

Blessed are the meek . . .

Kachoudas, the humble little tailor of the Rue des Prémontrés, was afraid; of this there could be no doubt. A thousand people, ten thousand to be exact—the entire population of the town except for the very young children—were afraid, too, but most of them did not dare to admit it even in the privacy of their own bedrooms.

Several minutes had gone by since Kachoudas had lit the electric light which he pulled by a wire into a position directly over his work. It was not yet five o'clock but the darkness of the November evening had closed in around him. It had rained steadily for a whole fortnight. A hundred yards away, at the cinema festooned with purple lights, where a bell sputtered to announce the beginning of every show, a newsreel showed people in other parts of the country navigating the streets in rowboats, and farmhouses cut off by torrents of water which carried along uprooted trees.

© 1949 by Georges Simenon.

Reprinted by permission of the Estate of Georges Simenon.

These facts were important; they had a bearing on the whole situation. If it hadn't been late autumn with the darkness coming on at four o'clock in the afternoon; if it hadn't rained from morning to night and from night to morning again, to the point where many people didn't have a stitch of dry clothes to put on their backs; if there hadn't been gusts of wind whirling down the narrow streets and turning umbrellas inside out as if they were gloves, then perhaps Kachoudas wouldn't have been afraid and, what's more, nothing would have happened.

Kachoudas was sitting with crossed legs on the big table that he had polished with his hindquarters all day long for the thirty years he had plied his trade as a tailor. He worked on a mezzanine floor with a low ceiling just above his shop. Just across the street an enormous sign in the form of a red top hat hung over the sidewalk in front of a haberdashery. When Kachoudas looked out, he could see under the sign into the shop of Monsieur Labbé.

This establishment was badly lighted. The electric-light bulbs were covered with dust and the window had not been washed for a long time. These details are less important, but they played their part. The haberdashery was old and so was the street on which it was situated, which had been the shopping center of the town before the five-and-ten-cent stores and others with glittering showcases had moved in on a thoroughfare five hundred yards away. Now the shops remaining on this dimly illuminated section of the street were so rundown that it looked as if no one ever went into them at all.

Here, then, was another reason for being afraid. And finally, this was the usual hour. At this time every day Kachoudas had the vaguely uncomfortable feeling that meant he must have the glass of white wine which a habit of long standing had made seem absolutely essential.

Monsieur Labbé across the street had exactly the same feeling; for him, too, this was the usual hour. As a result, he would say a few words to Alfred, his red-headed clerk, and put on a heavy overcoat with a velvet collar.

At the same time the little tailor would get down from his table, knot his tie, put on his jacket, and go down the spiral stairway, calling out behind him, "I'll be back in fifteen minutes."

This wasn't strictly true. He invariably stayed away for half an hour, but for many years now he had announced his return in fifteen minutes.

Just as he was slipping on his raincoat, one which a customer had

left and forgotten to call for, he heard the automatic bell ring as the door opened across the street. Monsieur Labbé, his coat collar turned up and his hands in his pockets, was walking close to the walls on the sheltered part of the sidewalk in the direction of the Place Gambetta.

The tailor's bell rang, too, a moment later, and Kachoudas stepped into the driving rain hardly ten yards behind his neighbor.

The two of them were quite alone on the street, where the gas lamps were spaced far apart, leaving stretches of darkness between them.

With a few quick steps Kachoudas could have overtaken the haberdasher. They were acquainted; exchanged greetings when they shut up their shops at the same time, and spoke to each other in the Cafe de la Paix where they were both due to arrive in a few minutes. But they occupied quite different ranks in society. Monsieur Labbé was Monsieur Labbé and Kachoudas was only Kachoudas.

Kachoudas, then, was bringing up the rear, and this fact served to reassure him. If someone were to attack him, he had only to cry out and the haberdasher would hear him. But what if the haberdasher were to run away? Kachoudas thought this over. The idea sent shivers down his spine, and the fear of being ambushed at a dark corner or alley caused him to walk in the middle of the street. There was not far to go. At the end of the Rue des Prémontrés lay the central square, well lighted and with a certain number of people about in spite of the rain. There a policeman was usually on duty.

The two men, one behind the other, turned to the left. The third building just ahead of them was the Cafe de la Paix, with its bright lights and comforting warmth. The regular customers were at their tables and Firmin, the waiter, was watching them play cards.

Monsieur Labbé took off his overcoat and shook it, and Firmin hung it on the rack. When Kachoudas came in, no one helped him off with his raincoat. Naturally, for he was only Kachoudas. The card players and those who were looking on at their game shook the haberdasher's hand and he sat down just behind the doctor. They gave a curt nod, or perhaps no sign of recognition at all, to Kachoudas, who could find no better place to sit than right up against the stove. As a result, steam began to rise from his trousers.

The steaming-wet trousers led the little tailor to make his discovery. He looked down at them and said to himself that because the cloth was not of very good quality the trousers would probably shrink again. Then, with a professional eye, he examined Monsieur

Labbé's trousers to see if their material was better. Of course, he did not make Monsieur Labbé's suits. None of the highly respectable people who frequented the cafe at this hour came to him for their clothes. At most, they gave him linings or patchwork to do.

There was sawdust on the floor and wet feet had left irregular marks in it and clumps of mud here and there. Monsieur Labbé was wearing expensive shoes and dark-grey, almost black trousers. On the cuff of his left trouser leg there was a tiny spot of white. If Kachoudas had not been a tailor, he would probably never have noticed it. He thought right away that it must be a thread, because tailors are given to pulling threads out. If he had not been such a humble little tailor, he would probably not have leaned over to pick it off.

The haberdasher noticed his gesture with some surprise. Kachoudas seized the white spot, which had slid down into the cuff, and it turned out to be not a thread but a scrap of paper.

"Excuse me," he murmured.

The Kachoudases were always excusing themselves. Centuries ago, when they were driven like cattle from Armenia to Smyrna and Syria and other such places, they had acquired this cautious mannerism.

It must be stressed that while Kachoudas was straightening himself up, there was not a single thought in his head. Or, to be exact, he thought only: It isn't a thread, after all.

He could see the legs and feet of the card players, the cast-iron feet of the marble-topped tables, and Firmin's white apron. Instead of throwing the scrap of paper on the floor, he held it out to the haberdasher, repeating: "Excuse me."

He felt that he must apologize because the haberdasher might wonder why in the world he had poked about in his trouser cuff.

But just as Monsieur Labbé took the paper, which was hardly bigger than a piece of confetti, Kachoudas suddenly stiffened and a most unpleasant shiver ran across the back of his neck. The worst of it was that the haberdasher and he were looking straight at each other. For a moment they went on staring. No one was paying them any attention; the players were at their cards and the others were watching the game.

Monsieur Labbé was a man who had been fat and then lost a good part of his weight. He was still fairly voluminous, but there was a flabby look about him. His drooping features were generally expressionless, and on this critical occasion they did not flicker. He took

the paper, rolled it between his fingers until it was no bigger than a pinhead, and said, "Thanks, Kachoudas."

This caused the little tailor any amount of reflection. For days and nights after, he asked himself: Was the haberdasher's voice natural? Ironical? Threatening? Sarcastic?

The tailor trembled and almost dropped the glass that he had picked up in order to keep his self-control. He must not look at Monsieur Labbé. It was too dangerous. It was a question of life and death—if, indeed, Kachoudas could hope to hang onto his life at all. He sat glued to his chair, apparently quite still, but with a feeling as if he were jumping up and down. There were moments when he had to hold himself back from running away as fast as he could go. What would happen if he were to get up and shout:

"This is the man!"

He was hot and cold at the same time. The heat of the stove was burning his skin and yet his teeth were on the point of chattering. All of a sudden he remembered how on the Rue des Prémontrés fear had caused him to follow the haberdasher as closely as he could. This was not the first time he had clung to his shadow, and he had done so only a quarter of an hour before. They had been quite alone in the dark street and now he knew that this was the man! The little tailor wanted to look at him on the sly, but he did not dare. One look might seal his fate.

Above all he must not run his hand over his neck, as he had a violent longing to do, akin to the temptation to scratch a bad itch.

"Another white wine, Firmin."

A further blunder. Usually he let half an hour go by before ordering a second glass. What should he do? What could he do?

The walls of the Cafe de la Paix were studded with mirrors, which reflected rising coils of cigarette and pipe smoke. Monsieur Labbé was the only one who smoked cigars and Kachoudas occasionally caught a whiff of them. At the other end of the room on the right, near the washroom, there was a telephone booth. Under the pretext of going to the toilet, couldn't he slip into it?

"Hello—Police? Your man is here."

What if Monsieur Labbé were to push into the booth behind him? No one would hear, for it was always done quite noiselessly. Not a single one of the six victims had cried out. They were all old women, to be sure. The killer had never attacked anyone but an old woman. That was why the men were so bold and didn't hesitate to go out on

the streets. But there was no reason why the killer should not break the rule.

"The man you're after is here. Come and get him."

Twenty thousand francs would be coming to him. This was the reward that everyone was trying to win—so many people, indeed, that the police were at their wits' end with the number of wild clues they were asked to follow. If he had twenty thousand francs— But, first of all, who would believe him? He would say:

"It's the haberdasher!"

And they would reply: "Prove it."

"I saw two letters—"

"What letters?"

"An *n* and a *t*."

He wasn't really sure about the *t*.

"Explain exactly what you mean, Kachoudas."

They would talk sternly to him; people always talk sternly to a Kachoudas.

"In the cuff of his trouser. Then he rolled it into a tiny ball."

Incidentally, where was that tiny ball now, the ball the size of a pinhead? Just try and find it! Monsieur Labbé might have let it drop on the floor where he could grind it with his heel into the sawdust. Or he might have swallowed it.

What did it prove, anyhow? That the haberdasher had cut two letters out of a newspaper? Not even that much. He might have picked up the scrap of paper almost anywhere without even noticing it. And what if he *had* had a whim to cut the letters out of a newspaper? It was enough to unsettle a much stronger man than the little tailor, to upset any one of the respectable businessmen sitting about him—shopkeepers, an insurance agent, a wine merchant, all well enough off to spend a good part of the afternoon playing cards and to drink several aperitifs every day.

They didn't know. No one knew except Kachoudas. And the man was aware that Kachoudas knew. The little tailor was perspiring as if he had drunk hot grog and taken a powerful dose of aspirin. Had the haberdasher noticed his nervousness? Did Kachoudas look as if he had caught on to the meaning of the scrap of paper?

How could he think over these critical matters without betraying his thoughts when the other man was smoking his cigar less than six feet away and he, Kachoudas, was supposed to be watching the card players?

"A white wine, Firmin."

He spoke up quite unintentionally, almost in spite of himself, because his throat was so dry. Three glasses of white wine were too many, more than he had ever drunk at a time except when his children were born. He had eight children now and was waiting for a ninth. No sooner was one born than another seemed to follow. It wasn't his fault, although every time people looked at him accusingly.

How could anyone kill a man with eight children and a ninth on the way, and probably a tenth after that? Just then someone, the insurance agent, who was dealing out the cards, said, "Queer, he hasn't killed an old woman for three days now. He must be scared."

There was Kachoudas, knowing what he knew, obliged to listen to this remark without so much as a look at the haberdasher. Then he had a stroke of his usual bad luck. As by dint of a tremendous effort, he looked straight ahead of him and saw Monsieur Labbé's face in a mirror on the wall. Monsieur Labbé was staring right at him. He was perfectly at ease, but nonetheless he was staring and it seemed to the little tailor as if there were a slight smile on his lips. He began to wonder if the haberdasher wasn't going to wink at him, the way he might wink at an accomplice as if to say, "A good joke, eh?"

Kachoudas heard his own voice say, "Waiter—"

A very good idea. Three glasses of wine were enough, more than enough, especially as too much made him sick.

"Your order, Monsieur?"

"Oh, nothing. Thank you."

After all, there was one perfectly reasonable explanation. It was a bit hazy in the little tailor's mind, but it did hold water. There might be two men instead of one: one of them the killer of old women of whom nothing was known beyond the fact that he had done away with six of them in the last three weeks; the other merely someone who wanted to amuse himself and mystify the town—an eccentric, perhaps, who sent the famous communications addressed to the *Courrier de la Loire* made up of single letters cut out of newspapers.

Why not? Such things have been known to happen. There are people who get strange ideas in their heads where crime is concerned. But if there were two men instead of one, how could the second one, who cut out and pasted up the letters, prophesy what the first one would do next?

For at least three of the murders had been announced ahead of time, all of them exactly the same way. The communications came

to the *Courrier de la Loire* in the mail and usually the words in them had been cut right out of the *Courrier* itself and carefully stuck one beside the other. For instance:

It was no use to call out a special squad. Another old woman tomorrow.

Some of the communications were longer. It must have taken quite some time to find the right words in the newspaper and fit them together like a puzzle.

Inspector Micou thinks he's smart just because he came down from Paris. But he's only a choir boy. He's foolish to drink all that brandy; it only makes his nose red.

By the way, didn't Inspector Micou, whom the Sûreté Nationale had sent to organize the hunt for the killer, stop in every now and then for a drink at the Café de la Paix? The little tailor had seen him there. It was quite true that he liked brandy, and people would question him quite casually.

"Well, then, Inspector?"

"We'll get him, never fear. Maniacs of his kind are sure to slip up on something. They're too pleased with themselves and they have to boast of what they've done."

Yes, the haberdasher had been right there when the Inspector had spoken these words.

Some fools say it's cowardice that makes me kill only old women. What if I simply can't stand old women? I have a right to dislike them, haven't I? But if they go on with this slander I'll kill a man, just to please them. A big strong man, too. It's all the same to me. That will teach them a lesson!

Kachoudas was small and thin, no bigger than a fifteen-year-old boy.

"You see, Inspector—"

The tailor jumped. Inspector Micou had just walked into the café along with Pijolet, the dentist. The Inspector was stout and hearty. He turned a chair around and sat astride it opposite the card players.

"Don't bother to move," he said to them.

"How's the hunt going?"

"Getting along, thank you, getting along."

"Any clues?"

Kachoudas could still see Monsieur Labbé staring at him in the

mirror, and he had a new and frightening thought. What if Monsieur Labbé were innocent—innocent of the murders and of writing to the newspaper about them? What if he had got the scrap of paper into his trouser cuff by mere chance, as one sometimes gets a flea?

He must put himself in the other's place. Kachoudas had leaned over and picked something up. Monsieur Labbé couldn't know where the scrap of paper had come from. Perhaps the little tailor himself had let it fall and tried to make it disappear on the floor, then nervously picked it up and held it out to his neighbor. Yes, why shouldn't the haberdasher suspect him just as much as he suspected the haberdasher?

"A white wine—"

Never mind! He had drunk too much, but all the same he wanted more. There seemed to him to be more smoke than usual in the cafe; faces were blurred and the card players' table faded away into the distance.

Yes, think of that. If Monsieur Labbé suspected him in exactly the same way, would he, too, set his mind on the twenty-thousand-franc reward? People said that he was rich, that it was because he didn't need money that he let his business slide. Otherwise he would clean his windows or even enlarge them, add more lighting, and get in some new stock. He couldn't hope that people would come to buy the hats in the styles of twenty years ago that sat on his dust-covered shelves.

Yes, if he were a miser the twenty thousand francs might be a temptation. He had only to accuse Kachoudas and most people would believe him. For Kachoudas was just the sort of fellow everyone inclines to distrust. Because he hadn't been born in the town, or even in the country, and he had a queerly shaped head which he held a little to one side. Because he lived among an ever-increasing brood of children and his wife hardly spoke a word of French.

But what of that? Why should the little tailor attack old women in the street without bothering to steal even their jewels or their handbags? So Kachoudas reasoned to himself, but the next minute he saw that the same argument held good for the haberdasher.

"Why should Monsieur Labbé, after living sixty years as a model citizen, suddenly feel an urge to strangle old women in dark streets?"

The problem was a complicated one. Neither the familiar atmosphere of the Cafe de la Paix nor the presence of Inspector Micou was reassuring any longer. Let someone merely suggest to Micou that

Kachoudas was guilty and Micou would take him at his word. But if it were a question of Monsieur Labbé—

He must think it over seriously. It was a question of life and death. Hadn't the killer announced in the newspaper that he might attack a man next? There was the badly lighted Rue des Prémontrés to walk through, and his shop was just across from that of the haberdasher, who could spy on everything he did. Then there were the twenty thousand francs. Twenty thousand! More than he could earn in six months.

"Tell me, Kachoudas—"

He felt as if he were coming down to earth from very far away, back among people whose presence he had for several minutes completely forgotten. Because he did not recognize the voice, his first impulse was to turn toward the haberdasher, who looked at him as he chewed his cigar. But it was not the haberdasher who had spoken to him; it was the Inspector.

"It is true that you work fast and don't overcharge?"

In a split second he realized what an unexpected piece of good luck this was, and he almost looked over at Monsieur Labbé to see if he had noticed the relief in his face. Kachoudas would never have dared go to the police. And he would have hesitated to write them a letter, because letters go into the files and one can never tell when they may cause trouble. And now the Inspector himself, the representative of the law, had practically offered to come to him.

"When it's for mourning I can deliver a suit within twenty-four hours," he said modestly, lowering his eyes.

"Then pretend that I'm going into mourning for the six old women and make me a suit just as fast. I brought hardly anything with me from Paris and the rain has been hard on my clothes. You have some good wool cloth, I hope."

"The best there is."

Good Lord! The little tailor's thoughts were running away with him! Perhaps it was the effect of four glasses of white wine. So much the worse! He ordered a fifth glass, in a more self-assured tone of voice than usual. Something wonderful was going to happen. Instead of going back alone, stricken with fear of Monsieur Labbé at every dark corner, he would get the Inspector to go with him under the pretext of taking his measurements. And once they were in the shop, behind closed doors—What a magnificent chance! The reward would be his! Twenty thousand francs! And without the slightest risk!

"If you can come with me for five minutes. My place is near."

His voice trembled. This was luck of the sort a Kachoudas can't count on, not after centuries of having been kicked around by his fellowmen and an unkind fate.

"I could take your measurements and have it ready for tomorrow evening at the same time."

How happy he was to get off to such a good start. All his worries were over, and everything was turning out all right, as if this were a fairy tale. Men playing cards. Good old Firmin (everyone looks good at a moment like this) watching the game. The haberdasher, whose gaze he sought to avoid. The Inspector coming back with him. They would go out together. He would close the door of his shop and no one would hear. "Listen, Inspector, I know who the killer is!"

Then his hopes were dashed to the ground. One little sentence spoiled everything.

"I'm not in *that* much of a hurry, Kachoudas."

The Inspector wanted to join in the card game and he knew that someone would give him a place as soon as the hand was over. "I'll come by tomorrow morning. You're always there, I suppose, aren't you? In weather like this, anyhow."

It was all up. His fine plans had collapsed. Yet the whole thing had seemed so easy. By tomorrow he would probably be dead, and his wife and children would never have the twenty thousand francs which he was entitled to leave them. For he was more and more convinced that he had a right to the reward. He was sure of it, and he rebelled against the sudden obstacle in his path.

"If you were to come this evening I could take advantage—"

No use. The haberdasher must be laughing up his sleeve. The hand was over and the insurance agent gave his place up to Inspector Micou. Detectives had no business playing cards! They should catch onto the slightest hint. Kachoudas couldn't very well beg him on bended knee to come at once for his measurements.

How was he to go away? Usually he stayed no more than half an hour at the cafe. This was his only distraction, his one folly. Then he always went home. The children were all back from school by then and they made the most infernal noise. The house smelled of cooking. Dolphine (she had a ridiculously French name in spite of hardly knowing the language) called them in a shrill voice. And he pulled down the light over his work and sewed for long hours, perched on the mezzanine table.

He himself smelled, he knew that. He smelled of garlic, which they used abundantly in their cooking, and of the grease in the wool

materials that he worked with all day. There were people in the Cafe de la Paix who drew back their chairs whenever he sat down near the table of the regular customers. Was that enough of a reason why the Inspector shouldn't come with him? Every one of the others in the cafe lived in the direction of the Rue du Palais—they all turned to the left when they went out, while he turned to the right.

It was a matter of life and death. "One more, Firmin."

Another glass of white wine. He had a terrible fear that the haberdasher might follow him out the door. But after he had ordered his wine it occurred to him that if Monsieur Labbé went out ahead of him he might lie in waiting at a dark corner of the Rue des Prémontrés. There was danger if the haberdasher left first, and even more danger if he left second. And yet Kachoudas couldn't stay there all night.

"Firmin—"

He hesitated. He knew that he was wrong, that he was going to be drunk, but there was nothing else to do.

"One more of the same."

Everyone was sure to look at him with suspicion.

"How is Mathilde?"

Someone had just asked this question, but who was it? Kachoudas' head was heavy by now—he must have been at his seventh glass of wine. In fact, there was curiosity as to whether he was celebrating the arrival of a new baby. The question he had just heard might have been from Germain, the grocer. It didn't matter much, anyhow. The men were all about the same age, between sixty and sixty-five. Most of them had been in the same class at school, they had started out playing marbles together. Later on they had gone to each other's weddings and all their lives long they spoke to each other in intimate terms. Probably every one of them, when he was fifteen or sixteen years old, had courted a girl who had later married one of his friends.

There was another group of cronies, ranging from forty to fifty years of age, who were ready to step into the shoes of their elders as soon as they left this earthly scene. They played cards at another table, in the left-hand corner of the cafe. They were a good deal noisier, but they arrived later on, about six o'clock, because they didn't have quite as much leisure.

"How is Mathilde?"

This was a phrase that the little tailor heard almost every day. Someone would say it quite casually, just as if he were saying, "Is

it still raining?" For Mathilde, the haberdasher's wife, had long since become a legend. Once upon a time she must have been a young girl like the rest. Perhaps some of the card players had stolen a kiss from her in their younger days. Then she had got married and probably she went in her best clothes to ten o'clock Mass every Sunday. For fifteen years she had lived on a mezzanine floor, just opposite to Kachoudas, but her curtains were almost always drawn together. He could only guess at the presence of her motionless white face behind the lace hangings.

"Mathilde's all right."

In other words, she was no worse, but her condition was just the same. She was a paralytic—every morning she was put into a chair and every evening put back to bed. So that the best that could be said for her was that she wasn't yet dead. After Mathilde the players spoke of a number of other things. They barely mentioned the killer, because the customers of the Cafe de la Paix affected a lack of interest in such things.

Kachoudas had not dared to go away for fear the haberdasher would leave just behind him. And so he went on drinking. Two or three times he noticed that Monsieur Labbé looked at the pale face of the clock hanging between two mirrors, but it never occurred to him to wonder why. This, however, is how he happened to notice that it was exactly seventeen minutes after six when the haberdasher got up and rapped with a coin on the marble table top to summon Firmin.

"How much do I owe you?"

When a man came in, he usually shook hands all around, but when he went out he said goodbye to everyone together. Some said, "See you tomorrow," and others said, "See you later on," which meant that they were coming back for another game after dinner.

He'll lie in wait at a dark corner of the Rue des Prémontrés and jump out at me as I go by.

If only he could pay for his own drinks in time to follow close on the haberdasher's heels and not let him out of his sight! Kachoudas was the shorter and thinner of the two and he probably could run faster. The best thing to do was to keep a short distance behind and be ready to run at the least sign of suspicious behavior.

The two men went out, one a few seconds after the other. Strangely enough, the card players turned to look after the little tailor rather than the haberdasher. There was something uneasy in his manner

and a doubt had crossed their minds. Someone half murmured, "Could he be the one?"

Outside, the wind was raging. At every corner it struck a man in the face and he either had to bend over double or else be thrown backward by its impact. It was raining hard. The little tailor's face was streaming and he shivered beneath his light raincoat. Never mind—he was right at the haberdasher's heels. He must keep up the pace, for in this nearness lay his only hope of safety.

Three hundred yards more, two hundred yards, one hundred yards, and he would be home where he could lock the door and barricade himself in until the Inspector came the next morning to see him.

He was still counting the seconds when he noticed that the haberdasher had gone by his shop, where the redheaded clerk could still be vaguely seen behind the counter. Kachoudas went by his own place almost unconsciously; a force stronger than himself impelled him to follow. Just as a little earlier the two of them were alone on the street, they continued to be alone in the more and more deserted section of the town which they were now entering. Each one of them could hear the other's footsteps, besides the echoes of his own. The haberdasher must know that he was being followed.

Kachoudas was half out of his senses with fear. Couldn't he stop, turn around, and go back home? Of course. Perhaps. But this never even occurred to him. Strange as it may seem, he was too congealed by fright. He went on, keeping about twenty yards behind his companion, and from time to time he spoke through the wind and rain to himself: "If he's really the killer—"

Was he still uncertain? Was it in order to satisfy his conscience that he had undertaken this chase? Every now and then the two men passed a lighted shop window. Then, one after the other, they plunged back into the darkness and could place each other only by the sound of their footsteps.

"If he stops, I'll stop, too."

The haberdasher did stop, and the tailor stopped after him. Then the haberdasher went on and the tailor followed him with a sigh of relief.

There were patrols all over the town, at least according to the newspaper. In order to preserve calm the police had thought up a so-called infallible patrol system. And, indeed, as they strode on one behind the other, they met three men in uniform trudging along in

step and Kachoudas heard them say, "Good evening, Monsieur Labbé."

When they came to him they flashed a light in his face and said nothing.

There were no old women in the streets. It was enough to make one wonder where the killer ever found his victims. They must all cling to their homes and go out only in broad daylight, preferably under escort. The two men passed the church of Saint Jean, where a dim light shone at the door. But for the last three weeks the old women must have given up coming to benediction.

The streets were growing narrower. There were empty lots and fences between the houses.

He's luring me outside of town to kill me.

Kachoudas was not a brave man, and now he was thoroughly afraid and ready to call for help at the least untoward movement on the part of the haberdasher. If he still followed him, it was not of his own free will.

They had come to a quiet street with new houses along it. He could hear the footsteps, and then all of a sudden there was silence. Kachoudas came to a stop in imitation of the man he was following, sight unseen. Where had the haberdasher gone? The sidewalks were dark. There were only three street lamps, at some distance from each other. There were a few lighted windows and from one house came strains of piano music. Always the same series of chords—from an exercise, Kachoudas thought, for he was not musical—which a learner was repeating over and over again with the same mistake at the end every time.

Had the rain stopped? In any case he was no longer aware of it. He dared neither go on nor turn back. He was alarmed by the slightest sound and worried lest the piano prevent him from hearing the footsteps that he was listening for.

The chords sounded five, ten times more, then the top of a piano was banged down. Evidently a lesson was at an end. There were loud cries and noise in the house. Probably a little girl, now that she was dismissed, was running to join her brothers and sisters. And someone was putting on a coat and saying to the mother at the door: "She's made some progress. But the left hand—she simply must practice with that left hand."

The door opened and the music teacher, who stood for a moment in a rectangle of light, was an elderly maiden lady.

"I promise you, Madame Bardon. I've only a hundred yards to go."

Kachoudas could not breathe. It never occurred to him to call out, "Stay where you are! Whatever you do, don't move!"

And yet he knew. He understood already how things would go. The old lady, who must have been a bit nervous, came down three steps from the door and trotted along close to the wall. It was her own street, after all, and she lived nearby. She had been born on this street and as a child she had played on its sidewalks and doorsteps; she knew every stick and stone of it.

Kachoudas heard her light, quick steps—then no steps at all! That was about all he could hear: the absence of footsteps. There was complete silence, and then a vague noise like the rustling of clothes. Could he possibly make himself move? And what good would it do? If he called for help, would anyone have the courage to come out of the house? He leaned up against a wall and his shirt stuck to his back, soaked with perspiration.

"Ah!" Kachoudas was the one to sigh. Perhaps the old lady had sighed, too, for the last time.

He heard steps again, a man's steps, retracing the way. The steps were coming toward Kachoudas. And Kachoudas, who had felt so sure that he could run faster than the haberdasher, could not even raise one foot from the ground! The haberdasher would see him. But didn't he know already that he was there? Hadn't he heard him just behind all the way from the Cafe de la Paix?

None of that mattered any more. Now the little tailor was entirely at the killer's mercy. This was Kachoudas' very clear impression and he did not argue with himself about it. The haberdasher seemed to take on superhuman proportions and Kachoudas was ready to fall down on his knees, if necessary, and swear to keep quiet for the rest of his life. Hang the twenty thousand francs!

He did not move as Monsieur Labbé drew nearer. Soon they would touch. At the last minute would Kachoudas have the strength to run? And if he did run, wouldn't he be accused of the murder? All the haberdasher had to do was to call for the police. They would run after him and catch him.

"Why were you running away?"

"Because—"

"Speak up. Didn't you kill the old lady?"

The two of them were alone on the street, and there was nothing to indicate that one of them was guilty rather than the other. Monsieur Labbé was quicker-witted, and he was a man of a certain

position, a native of the town, on intimate terms with the leading citizens and with a cousin in Parliament.

"Good night, Kachoudas."

Strange as it may seem, that was all that happened.

Monsieur Labbé must have barely made out his silhouette drawn back into the shadows. To tell the truth, Kachoudas had climbed up onto a doorstep and he had a finger on the doorbell, ready to push it at a moment's notice. And then the killer greeted him quietly as he went by, with a voice that was muffled but not particularly threatening.

"Good night, Kachoudas."

He tried to answer, for the sake of politeness. It seemed to him absolutely necessary to have good manners with a man of this type and to return his greeting. He opened his mouth, but in vain; no sound came out of it. The footsteps were already moving away when he managed to get out: "Good night, sir."

He heard his own voice, but he had spoken too late, when the haberdasher was already some distance away. Out of sheer delicacy Kachoudas had not called Monsieur Labbé by name, in order not to compromise him in any way. Exactly!

He was still on the doorstep. He had not the slightest desire to go see the old lady who half an hour before had been giving a piano lesson and who by now must have definitely gone on to another world. Monsieur Labbé was far away by this time.

All of a sudden, panic overtook him. He mustn't stay in this place. He felt a strong urge to get away as fast as his legs would take him, and at the same time he was afraid of running into the haberdasher. He might be arrested from one minute to the next. Just a short while before, a patrol had flashed a light in his face—they had seen and recognized him. How could he explain his presence in this section of the town, where he had no business and where someone had just been murdered? So much the worse! The best thing was to make a clean breast of the whole thing to the police. He started to walk along at a good pace, moving his lips.

"I'm only a poor tailor, Inspector, but I swear on the heads of my children—"

The least noise made him jump. The haberdasher might now be lying in ambush for him, just as he had done for the old lady. He took a roundabout way and wandered through a maze of narrow streets where he had never set foot before.

"He couldn't imagine that I would come by here."

He wasn't a complete fool.

"I'm willing to tell you everything, but you must assign one or two of your men to guard me until he's behind bars."

If need be, he'd stay at the police station. Not a very comfortable place, but he'd seen worse in the course of his travels. He wouldn't hear his children's whining, that was one good thing. It was not very far from his own house, just two streets beyond the Rue des Prémontrés. Already he could see the red light with the word *Police* across it. There must be an officer right at the door, as usual. He was in no danger. In fact, he was safe at last.

"You'd be making a serious mistake, Monsieur Kachoudas."

He stopped short. A real voice had spoken, the voice of a man of flesh and blood, the voice of the haberdasher. The haberdasher stood there against the wall, with his calm face barely visible through the darkness. Is a man responsible for his actions at such a moment? Kachoudas stammered, "I beg your pardon?"

Just as if he had bumped into someone on the street, or trod on a lady's foot. Then, when nothing more was said and he was left strictly alone, he turned quietly around. He must not look as if he were running away; on the contrary, he must walk in a perfectly normal manner. No one was going to follow him right away. He had time to escape. At last he did hear steps behind him, but they were neither quicker nor slower than his own. In other words, the haberdasher wouldn't catch up with him.

Here was his own street, and his shop with a few samples of dark materials and some fashion drawings in the window. And the other shop across the street. He opened the door, shut it again, and turned the key in the lock.

"Is that you?" his wife called.

As if it could have been anyone else at such a late hour and in this weather!

"Be sure to wipe off your shoes."

At this point he wondered whether he was really awake. After all he had lived through, and with the massive shadow of the haberdasher still looming at the opposite doorway, all she could say was: "Be sure to wipe off your shoes."

He felt very much like fainting. And what would she have said then?

Kachoudas was kneeling on the floor with his back to the window and just in front of him, only a few inches from his nose, were the

rotund legs and stomach of a man in an upright position. This man was Inspector Micou, who had not been distracted by the crime of the evening before from coming to have the tailor take his measurements.

The little tailor passed his tape measure around the waist and the hips, wet his pencil on the end of his tongue, and wrote down the figures in a greasy notebook lying on the floor; then he went on to measure the length of the trouser leg and the crotch. All this time Monsieur Labbé stood behind the lace curtains of the window at exactly the same height on the other side of the street. There were no more than eight yards between them.

Kachoudas had an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach. The haberdasher would not shoot, he was sure of that. He would not shoot because, first of all, he was not the sort of murderer to go in for firearms. Murderers have their pet ways of doing things, just like anyone else, and they are not easily divorced from their habits. Besides, if he did shoot, he would simply be giving himself up to the police.

In the next place, the haberdasher had confidence in Kachoudas. This was the real point. And yet couldn't the little tailor, from his kneeling position, murmur to the rotund statue whose measurements he was taking:

"Don't move. Pretend nothing has happened. The haberdasher across the street is the killer. He's spying on us right now from behind his window."

But he said nothing at all, and continued to play the part of an innocent and unpretentious tailor. There was an unpleasant odor on the mezzanine, but this did not bother Kachoudas in the slightest degree, for he was quite used to the greasy smell of wool which he carried around with him wherever he went. Probably Monsieur Labbé's shop across the way had the staler and even more unpleasant odor of felt and glue. Every trade has its own stink. If such is the case, what smell is characteristic of a detective? This thought ran through Kachoudas' mind, proving that he had recovered to some extent his aplomb.

"If you can come back late this afternoon for a fitting, I hope I can let you have your suit tomorrow morning."

He went downstairs behind the Inspector, then passed in front of him as they walked through the shop and opened the door, causing the bell to ring automatically. Neither of them had spoken of the

killer, or of the elderly maiden lady, Mademoiselle Irene Mollard, whose murder was all over the front page of the newspaper.

And yet the tailor had spent a very restless night, so restless that his wife had wakened him to say, "Try to lie quietly, will you? You do nothing but kick me!"

After that he couldn't fall asleep again. He lay awake, thinking hour after hour until his head began to ache. By six o'clock in the morning he had enough of lying in bed and thinking, and he got up. After he had made himself a cup of coffee he went to his workroom and lit a fire. Of course he had to put a light on, for it was not yet day. There was a light across the street, too, since for years the haberdasher had got up at half past five every morning. Unfortunately, one couldn't see him through the curtains, but it was easy to guess what he was doing.

Monsieur Labbé's wife would have no callers. Very rarely did a friend penetrate beyond the front door and then for only a short time. She would not receive care even from the hands of the cleaning woman, who arrived every morning at seven o'clock and stayed until night. Monsieur Labbé had to do everything for her himself—put her room in order, bring up her meals, and carry her from her bed to her chair and back. Twenty times a day, when he heard her signal, he rushed up his spiral stairway from the shop to the mezzanine floor. Her signal was a very special one. A cane was placed near her chair and she still had enough strength in her left hand to tap with it on the floor.

The little tailor went back to his work, sitting cross-legged on the table.

Watch out, Kachoudas, he said to himself. Twenty thousand francs are no joke, and it would be too bad to let them go. But life is worth something, too, even the life of a little tailor from the wilds of Armenia. Even if the haberdasher is crazy, he can think faster than you. If he's arrested they'll probably have to let him go for lack of proof. It's not very likely that he amuses himself by scattering bits of newspaper all over the house.

It was wise to think things over unhurriedly as he sewed. Already a new idea had come to him. Some of the communications sent to the *Courrier de la Loire* were a whole page long. It must have taken hours of painstaking work to find the right words and letters, cut them out, and paste them up in order. Downstairs in the haberdashery shop, Alfred, the redheaded clerk, was always about. Behind the shop there was a workshop with wooden head forms where Mon-

sieur Labbé blocked hats, but a peephole with a glass window connected these two downstairs rooms. The cleaning woman reigned over the kitchen and the rest of the house, so that a process of elimination made it clear that the only place where the killer could devote himself to his cutting and pasting was the bedroom shared by his wife and himself, where no one was allowed to enter. Madame Labbé could not move; she could not even talk except by making a succession of weird sounds. What did she think when she saw her husband cutting out scraps of paper?

What's more, Kachoudas, my friend, if you accuse him now and some proof of his guilt is found, those fellows (he meant the police and his new customer, Inspector Micou) will claim that they did the whole job and take the reward away from you.

Fear of losing the twenty thousand francs and fear of Monsieur Labbé. The tailor was caught between these two fears. But by nine o'clock, his fear of the haberdasher had almost gone. In the middle of the night the noise of water flooding the gutters, of raindrops beating on the roof, and of wind whistling through the shutters came to a sudden end. After a long fortnight, the storm was miraculously over.

By six in the morning there was only a drizzle of rain, silent and almost invisible to the naked eye. Now patches of the sidewalk returned to their natural grey color and people were walking around without umbrellas. It was Saturday, the weekly market day. The market occupied a little old square at the end of the street.

At nine o'clock, then, Kachoudas went downstairs, unlatched his door, and started to take away the heavy dark-green-wood panels that protected the windows of his shop. He was carrying in the third of these panels when he heard the noise of panels of exactly the same sort coming down across the street at the haberdashery. He took care not to look around. He was not too worried because the butcher was talking from his doorstep to the shoemaker. He heard steps coming across the street and then a voice said, "Good morning, Kachoudas."

With a panel in one hand, Kachoudas managed to say in an almost natural tone of voice, "Good morning, Monsieur Labbé."

"Look here, Kachoudas—"

"Yes, Monsieur Labbé?"

"Has there ever been anyone crazy in your family?"

His first reaction was to dig into his memory, to think of all his uncles and aunts.

"I don't think so."

There was a satisfied look on Monsieur Labbé's face, and he said just before turning around, "That doesn't matter—that doesn't matter."

The two men had made contact, that was all. What they had actually said was of no importance. They had exchanged a few words like the good neighbors they were. Kachoudas had not shown any fear. Wouldn't the butcher over there, who was big and strong enough to carry a hog on his shoulders, have paled if someone had said to him, "That man looking at you with those grave dreamy eyes is the killer of the seven old women?"

At the moment Kachoudas could think of nothing but the twenty thousand francs. He went back up to his low-ceilinged mezzanine workroom, climbed up on the table, and sat down to work again.

Across the street, Monsieur Labbé was blocking hats. He didn't sell many new hats but his friends at the Cafe de la Paix had him block their old ones. Every now and then he appeared in a vest and shirtsleeves in the shop. And from time to time, when he heard his wife's signal, he dashed up the spiral staircase.

When Madame Kachoudas came back from the market and began to talk to herself in the kitchen, as she always did, there was a slight smile on the tailor's face. What was it the newspaper had said?

"If we go back over the crimes one by one we shall see—"

First of all, the article went on to say, the crimes were committed not in any particular section of the town but at its farthest extremities. "Therefore," the writer concluded, "the killer can go from place to place without attracting attention. This means that he is an ordinary- or innocent-looking man. In spite of the fact that his crimes are committed in the dark, he has to walk under street lamps or in front of lighted shop windows."

He's a man who doesn't need money, because he doesn't rob his victims.

He must be a musician, because he surprises his victims from the rear and strangles them with the string of a violin or a cello.

"If we look back over the list of the women he has killed—"

This aroused the interest of Kachoudas.

"—we shall see that there is a certain connection among them. This isn't very easy to put a finger on. Their social status has varied. The first one was the widow of a retired Army officer and the mother

of two married children who live in Paris. The second kept a little dry-goods shop and her husband has a job at the Town Hall. The third—”

A midwife, a clerk in a bookshop, a rich old lady living in a house all her own, a half crazy woman—rich, too—who wore nothing but lavender, and finally Mademoiselle Irene Mollard, the music teacher.

“Most of these women,” the article continued, “were from sixty-three to sixty-five years old and all of them were natives of this town.”

The little tailor was struck by the name of Irene. One doesn't expect an old woman or an old maid to be called Irene, or Chouchou, or Lili. One forgets that long before she was old she was a young girl and once upon a time a little child. You see! There was nothing extraordinary about that. But while he worked on the Inspector's suit, Kachoudas mulled this idea over and over in his mind.

What went on, for instance, at the Cafe de la Paix. A dozen or so men met there every afternoon. They were from various walks of life, most of them fairly well off, because it is normal to have attained a certain prosperity after the age of sixty. They all called each other by their first names. And not only did they call each other by their first names but they spoke in a language all their own, with bits of slang and jokes that nobody outside the group could understand or appreciate. And this was simply because they had all gone to the same school and done their military service together. This was the reason why Kachoudas would always be treated like a stranger, why nobody asked him to take a hand at a card game unless there was no one else available. For months he had waited for an empty place at a card table.

“Do you see what I mean, Inspector? I'm sure that the seven victims knew each other as well as the regular customers at the Cafe de la Paix. It's only because old ladies don't go to cafes that they see each other less frequently. We must find out whether they weren't all friends and how often they called on one another. They were all about the same age, Inspector. Then there's one more detail that comes back to my mind—it was in the newspaper, too. Each one of them was described in somewhat the same words as being ‘well born’ and ‘well educated.’”

Of course, he wasn't talking to Inspector Micou or to any other member of the police. He had a way of talking to himself, like his wife, especially when he was happy.

"Let us imagine that we know on what basis the killer—I mean, the haberdasher—chose his victims—"

For he picked them out in advance—Kachoudas had witnessed that. He didn't just stroll around the streets casually in the evening and jump on the first old woman who crossed his path. The proof of this lay in the fact that he had made straight for the house where Mademoiselle Mollard (Irene) was giving a music lesson. He must have acted in the same way on previous occasions. As soon as it could be found out how he laid his plans, on what basis he drew up his list— Exactly! Why not? He was proceeding just as if he had drawn up a complete and definitive list. Kachoudas could imagine him coming home at night and scratching off a name.

How many old women were on the list altogether? How many women were there in the whole town between sixty-three and sixty-five years of age, *well born and well educated?*"

Before the tailor had lunch at noon, he went downstairs for a moment to get a breath of fresh air on the sidewalk and to buy some cigarettes at the corner tobacco shop. Monsieur Labbé was just coming out of his door, with his hands in his overcoat pockets. When he saw the little tailor, he pulled out one of his hands and gave a friendly wave. This was the way it should be. They exchanged greetings and smiled. Probably the haberdasher had a letter in his pocket and was on his way to mail it. After each murder he sent a communication to the local newspaper. The one which Kachoudas read that evening in the *Courrier de la Loire* ran as follows:

Inspector Micou is silly to enlarge his wardrobe as if he were going to stay here months longer.

Two more and I'll have finished. Greetings to my little friend across the street.

Kachoudas read the newspaper in the Cafe de la Paix. The Inspector himself was there, somewhat concerned about the delivery of his suit when he saw that the tailor had left his work. The haberdasher was there, too, playing cards.

Monsieur Labbé found a way of looking at Kachoudas with a smile, a smile with no reservations behind it. Perhaps he really had no reservations, but had a feeling of genuine friendship. Then the little tailor realized that the haberdasher was glad that there was at least one witness to his deeds, someone who had seen him at work. In short, someone to admire him! And he, too, smiled, slightly embarrassed.

"I must go work on your suit, Inspector. You can try it on in an

hour. Firmin!" He hesitated. Yes or no? Yes! Quick, a white wine! A man who's going to make twenty thousand francs can easily afford a second glass.

The little tailor was impressed. First of all by the chimes of the doorbell, whose echoes swelled endlessly through the apparently empty building. Then by the huge grey-stone facade, the closed shutters with only a pale light glimmering through them, the heavy varnished door, and the polished knob. Luckily, it was no longer raining and his shoes weren't muddy.

He heard muffled steps. A barred peephole opened, as in a prison, and one could guess at the pale heavy face behind it by a slight noise which was caused not by chains but by a swinging rosary. Someone looked at him in silence and finally he stammered, "May I talk to the Mother Superior?"

For a moment he was afraid and trembled. The street was deserted. He had counted on the continuation of the card game. But Monsieur Labbé might have given up his place. And Kachoudas was running a very great risk. If the haberdasher had followed him and was hidden somewhere in the shadows, he surely wouldn't hesitate, in spite of the smile of a short while ago, to add Kachoudas to the list of his victims.

"Mother Saint Ursula is in the refectory. Who shall I tell her is here?"

Good God, if only she'd open the door!

"My name wouldn't mean anything to her. Just tell her that it's something very important."

The nun's muffled steps retreated into the distance and she stayed away an infinitely long time. At last she came back and released three or four well oiled latches.

"If you'll follow me—"

The air was warm, stale, and a trifle sugary. Everything was ivory color except for the black furniture. The silence was such that one could hear the ticking of several clocks, some of which must have been in rooms quite far away.

He did not dare sit down and he did not know how to behave. He had to wait for some time and then he jumped at the sight of an elderly nun whose approach he had not noticed.

How old is she? he wondered, for it is hard to guess at the age of a nun beneath her white cap.

"You asked to see me?"

He had telephoned beforehand from his shop to Monsieur Cujas, the husband of the second victim, who had a job at the Town Hall. Monsieur Cujas was still there, at the Lost and Found office.

"Who is calling?" Monsieur Cujas shouted impatiently.

Kachoudas had to screw up his courage before answering.

"One of the detectives with Inspector Micou. Can you tell me, Monsieur Cujas, where your wife went to school?"

To the Convent of the Immaculate Conception was the answer. He might have known that, since the victim had been described as well educated.

"I beg your pardon, Reverend Mother—"

He stammered, feeling more uncomfortable than he had ever felt in his life.

"I'd like to see a list of all your former pupils who might now be sixty-three or sixty-four or—"

"I am sixty-five years old myself."

She had a smooth rosy face and she observed him closely, toying the while with the beads of the heavy rosary that hung from her belt.

"You've had a narrow escape, Reverend Mother."

This was a rather tactless remark. He was panicky. Panicky because he felt surer and surer that he would win the twenty-thousand-franc reward.

"Mademoiselle Mollard came to school here, didn't she?"

"She was one of our most brilliant pupils."

"And Madame Cujas?"

"Desjardins, she was called as a girl."

"Tell me, Reverend Mother, were they both in the same class?"

"I was in the same class myself. That is why, during these past few weeks—"

But he could not wait to hear her answer.

"If I could have a list of all the girls who were here at that time?"

"Are you from the police?"

"No, Madame—Reverend Mother, I mean. But it amounts to the same thing. Just imagine, I know!"

"What do you know?"

"That is, I think I shall know soon. Do you ever go out?"

"Every Monday, to the Bishop's palace."

"At what time of day?"

"At four o'clock."

"If you will be so kind as to make me the list—"

What could she be thinking? Perhaps she took him for the killer. No—she was perfectly serene.

"There aren't many of us left from that class. Quite a few have died—and just recently."

"I know, Reverend Mother."

"Only Armandine and myself—"

"Who is Armandine, Reverend Mother?"

"Madame d'Hauterive. You must have heard of her. The rest have left town and we haven't kept up with them. I have an idea—just wait a minute."

Perhaps a nun, too, enjoys a distraction from her usual routine. After an absence of only a few minutes, she came back with a yellowed picture of two rows of young girls, all wearing the same uniform and the same ribbon with a medal attached to it around their necks. And pointing to a weak-looking figure, she said, "There is Madame Labbé, the wife of the haberdasher. And this one, who's slightly cross-eyed."

Mother Saint Ursula was quite right. Besides the haberdasher's wife there were only two members of the class still alive in the town: Mother Saint Ursula and Madame d'Hauterive.

"Madame Labbé is very ill. I must go call on her next Saturday. That is her birthday and a group of her old school friends have always met in her sick-room."

"Thank you, Reverend Mother."

The twenty thousand francs were his! Or at least they soon would be. Every one of the haberdasher's victims was in the photograph. And the only two still alive, besides Madame Labbé, were obviously those whom the killer had announced as his next and last victims.

"Thank you again, Reverend Mother. I must go immediately. Someone is waiting for me."

Perhaps his behavior wasn't entirely correct; he wasn't used to convent ways. If they took him for an oaf or a madman there wasn't much he could do about it. He thanked the Mother Superior once more, bowed, backed his way out, and started to run down the sidewalk outside so fast that he found it hard to slow up.

Twenty thousand francs! Twenty thousand francs they had promised for the killer, for the killer alone. Wasn't he entitled to more if he brought them a complete list of the victims, both past and future? Thanks to him, two of them would survive for some years to come.

"Prove your case."

What if they were to say that?

"Prove it! Prove that these two persons were to be the next victims. What right have you to claim that a man like Monsieur Labbé planned to murder Mother Saint Ursula? What? Speak up!"

And yet only a bit of understanding was necessary. An understanding of why the haberdasher had drawn up his list in the first place.

"I must go call on her next Saturday," the Mother Superior had said, speaking of Madame Labbé. "That is her birthday and a group of her old school friends have always met in her sick-room."

Twenty thousand francs. Perhaps fifty thousand, perhaps more. Madame d'Hauterive was rich, and when she learned that she owed her life to a little tailor with a large family—

His wife was waiting at the front door.

"He's upstairs."

"Who's upstairs?"

"The Inspector."

"Good!" he cried, with a self-assurance to which she was not accustomed. Never had he wondered whether every man has a chance of living one glorious hour, one hour when he can live up to the best that is in him. And yet just such an hour had come.

"Good evening, Inspector. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but I've been very busy."

That was the way! He had spoken in the easygoing tone of voice of the most affluent gentlemen of the Cafe de la Paix. He had not forgotten the gestures natural to his profession, but he performed them with such grace that he seemed to be juggling with the unattached pieces of the Inspector's suit.

"Tell me—the twenty thousand francs' reward. There's no catch to it, is there?"

"Have you a little theory of your own, too?"

A little theory! A little theory, the Inspector called it! When Kachoudas had seen the killer at work with his own eyes! When he knew who the next victims would be and had just this minute left the company of one of them!

"Listen, Inspector. If I were quite sure about the reward—"

"Well, I can tell you one thing. If you want to win it, you'd better hurry up."

They didn't believe him. It was all a joke. They were making fun of him. The Inspector added, "There's someone waiting for me right

now in my office. A woman. Apparently she claims the reward. They called me just now at the cafe."

"What's her name?" Kachoudas asked distrustfully.

"Does it interest you?"

"It isn't a nun, is it?"

"Why should it be a nun?"

"Does her last name have a *de* in it? Is her first name Armandine?"

He had no intention of letting his twenty thousand francs slip away from him. "If she's neither one of those two, Inspector, she can only be telling you a fairy tale."

Then the Inspector let drop: "You ought to know who she is. She works right across the street from you."

Kachoudas listened intently with a hard expression on his face.

"She's the cleaning woman of your friend the haberdasher."

For at least two minutes the Inspector was left trussed up in an unfinished suit, which had only one sleeve and no collar, while the little tailor strode nervously up and down, and every now and then his mouth was twisted into a sarcastic smile. It was impossible. It wasn't right. He had thought of everything except that old cleaning woman. What credit did she deserve for the fact that she had access to the house and could spy on everything? She hadn't thought of the Convent of the Immaculate Conception, had she? She didn't know the names of the next victims.

"Look here, Inspector. Suppose I tell you right away."

But what about proof? Always that confounded matter of proof! And to think that the cleaning woman *might* have proof, even if they were only scraps of paper she had picked out of the garbage can.

"It's only fair, when all's said and done, that the first-comer should have the reward, isn't it?"

"Of course."

The light was on across the street, as it always was at this hour. It made only a vague circle behind the lace curtains, but one could guess at the shape of Madame Labbé's chair and her motionless white face.

"Saturday is her birthday—"

"What's that?"

"Never mind. Saturday the sixty-three- to sixty-five-year-old survivors are scheduled to meet in her sick-room and—"

This was not Kachoudas' hour of glory, it was his exact minute. He must hurry, on account of the cleaning woman.

"Listen, my man—"

"Twenty thousand francs, then?"

"Yes, if you—"

If he could prove it, of course.

"Look here—"

Kachoudas picked up the heavy scissors with which he had cut the cloth that was now draped so strangely around the Inspector. He opened the window and made a desperate gesture, hurling the scissors straight at the window on the other side of the street.

Then he stood perfectly still, quivering inside. The glass across the street had shattered with a tremendous noise. He had to catch his breath before a smile came over his face, a triumphant smile that a little tailor of his kind can afford only once in a lifetime. Across the street he and the Inspector could see in the chair of the haberdasher's invalid wife only a wooden head on top of a pile of rags.

"Tell me, madame—"

"Mademoiselle, if you please."

A sour old thing, Monsieur Labbé's cleaning woman! They had brought her over from the police station, and as soon as she saw her employer in handcuffs she knew that she was too late.

"You knew that Madame Labbé was dead, did you?"

"I was sure of it."

"For how long a time?"

"Months and months. I was sure, that is, without really knowing—"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, mostly on account of the fish."

"What fish?"

"All kinds of fish—herring, halibut, cod. She couldn't eat fish."

"Why not?"

"Fish upset her. Lots of people are like that. If I don't get at least a share of the twenty thousand francs, then there's no justice—"

Kachoudas stirred in his corner, but the Inspector made a reassuring sign in his direction.

"What was that about the fish?"

"Well, one day when I had cooked some fish for him and I wanted to send up some meat to his wife, he told me that I needn't bother. He took all her meals to her, you know, and kept her room in order. Then there was the string."

"What string?"

"The string I found last week when I was cleaning up his workshop. He never wanted me to go in there, but I made up my mind to do it while he was away, because there was such a bad smell. Back of the hats I found a string hanging from the ceiling. He pulled on that to make the same noise that his wife used to make when she tapped with her cane on the floor. As for the twenty thousand francs, I'm going to see a lawyer—"

Kachoudas almost rose again. Monsieur Labbé gave a dignified smile.

"So first of all you killed your wife—"

He shrugged

"You strangled her the same way you did the others."

"Not the same way, Inspector. With my hands. She was suffering too much."

"Or rather you were tired of looking after her."

"As you like."

"Then you began to kill off your wife's friends. Why? And why in such rapid succession?"

Kachoudas raised his hand as if he were at school. "Because of the birthday!" he shouted.

"Quiet, please," said the Inspector. "Let Monsieur Labbé talk."

Monsieur Labbé nodded approvingly at the little tailor.

"Exactly. He's quite right. They all had to be killed before next Saturday."

And he winked at Kachoudas. There was no doubt about it: he winked at him as if he were an accomplice. It was just as if he were saying, "They'll always blunder along. But we two—we understand each other."

And the little tailor, who had just won his twenty thousand francs, could not help smiling back.

... for they shall inherit the earth.

—translated by Frances Frenaye

"Q"

CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

EQ APRIL/91

ELLERY QUEEN—published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$3.50 per word—payable in advance—(\$52.50 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Director, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

ADDITIONAL INCOME

GET PAID FOR READING BOOKS! \$100 per book. Write Calco Publishing (Dept. C-107), 500 South Broad, Meriden, CT 06450.

EASY work. Excellent pay mailing letters. Send \$1.00 and Self-addressed stamped envelope to Z.T., 626 West South Street, Shelbyville, Indiana 46176.

AUTHOR'S SERVICE

LOOKING for a publisher? Learn how you can have your book published, promoted, distributed. Send for free booklet. HP-5, Vantage Press, 516 W. 34th St., New York, NY 10001.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

WORLD'S largest mystery stock. Search Service. Free catalogues. Limited Editions. Aardvarks Book Detectives, P.O. Box 585070, Orlando, FL 32858.

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, ME 04609.

READ "How To Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective Classified Ad. Also includes certificate worth \$5.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy, send \$3.75 (includes postage) to: Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

VINTAGE Mysteries—Free Catalogue! Good, Inexpensive, Recycled Detective Fiction. Grave Matters, Box 32192-A, Cincinnati, Ohio 45232.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

ANNOTATED lists of new mysteries. Also used mystery catalog. Rue Morgue, 946 Pearl, Boulder, CO 80302. Order any in-print mystery: 1-800-356-5586.

SEND 25¢ for Large Listing of Mystery and Detective Books. Canford, Drawer 216E, Freeville, NY 13068.

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. All subjects invited. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SMP, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

MYSTERIES! Used paperback, hardcover for readers and collectors. Two stamps. D. Williams, Box 1185, St. Paul, MN 55101.

DO You Write? Publisher seeks manuscripts, all types/subjects. Free manuscript examination/brochure. 1-800-695-9599.

NEW MYSTERY GROUP® Magazine, Best New Exclusive Stories. Block Gault Kaminsky Lutz Natsuke Prather Raisch Resnicow Slesar Vachss. \$27w/l#1! 175 Fifth Avenue #2001, NYC 10010.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60559.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing Mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Start immediately! Rush stamped envelope! Food-master-MDC, Burnt Hills, NY 12027-9983.

Classified Continued

EQ APRIL/91

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

NEW! GROW EXPENSIVE PLANTS. SELL FOR 2,000% PROFIT. FREE information. GROWBIZ, Box 306-12, Seminary, MS 39479.

READ BOOKS for pay! No exp. Call 1-900-847-7878 (\$0.99/min) or Write: PASE - LZ8, 161 Lincolnway, North Aurora, IL 60542.

CLEANING Business. Be your own boss! \$3.00 Sase: Robert, Box 5966, Pasadena, TX 77508.

LET The Government Finance your small business. Grants/loans to \$500,000. Free recorded message: 707-448-0270. (JN5).

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations . . . Closeouts . . . Job Lots . . . Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 1409-IO, Holland MI 49422.

EARN money selling gold, silver and costume jewelry, rings, watches—Buy Direct. Wholesale Prices. Catalog \$1.00. Anka-A, 40 Free-way Drive, Cranston, RI 02920-7936.

FIRST QUALITY Ladies Sweaters, Sportswear, Lingerie For Resale. Sase to: Jo-Lyn, 3030 Studley, Charlotte, NC 28212.

500,000 items below wholesale—Everything Imaginable! Free outline Catalog! Bargains, Box 931-DW, Cullman, AL 35055.

DISTRIBUTORS WANTED

CELLULAR phone sales. Outside reps. Keep present job. Work with GTE. Guaranteed best prices. No territories. Dennis, 714-944-3117.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME, diploma awarded. Low tuition. Our 92nd year. Phone free any time. 1-800-228-5600, or write American School, Dept. #388, 850 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION—Cont'd

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets. Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, New Bern, NC 28563.

FOR INVENTORS

PROFITABLE IDEA? Market that Idea! *Patenting *Research *Marketing. Call The Concept Network for your Free Kit. 1-800-835-2246 Ext. 197.

HELP WANTED

HOMEWORKERS WANTED! Earn Top Pay Processing Mail For Large Mailorder Company! Sincere Individuals only. For Details, Send \$2 Plus Sase to: C. Pierce, Box 9672, Dept. DA953, Brea, California 92622-9672.

INVENTIONS WANTED

INVENTORS! Your first step is important. For FREE advice, call ADVANCED PATENT SERVICES, Washington, DC. 1-800-458-0352.

PROTECT, PATENT AND DEVELOP, Your invention rights before sale. Registered Patent Agent and Licensed Professional Engineer. Send for FREE PATENT INFORMATION Every Inventor Should Have. Richard L. Miller, 12 Parkside Drive, Suite-I, Dix Hills, NY 11746-4879. (516) 499-4343.

INVENTIONS MARKETED. Cash, Royalties. FREE INVENTION PROTECTION CERTIFICATES, GEORGE SPECTOR, Manufacturers Representative, Dept. O, Woolworth Building, New York, NY 10007.

MAILING LISTS

GUARANTEED! Hotline opportunity seekers! Mixed States! 200/\$10; 500/\$15; 1000/\$25. Immediate Shipment! FREE money making report you can print and sell. Advon, Drawer B27, Shelley, ID 83274. Visa/MC/Amex 1-800-992-3866.

**YOU'LL MAKE
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—
BY READING and ANSWERING
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**

Classified Continued

EQ APRIL/91

MAILING LISTS—Cont'd

ACTIVE NEW OPPORTUNIST NAMES! GUARANTEED! FAST DELIVERY! MIXED STATES! 200/\$10; 500/\$15; 1000/\$25. Dealer's Co-Op, Box 526-I, Griffith, IN 46319. 1-800-992-9405.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing Mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Start immediately! Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027-9983.

READ "How To Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective Classified Ad. Also includes certificate worth \$5.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy, send \$3.75 (includes postage) to: Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

\$2000 Monthly Possible, Assembling Products. Write: Or Call Amazing Recording 908-506-0600, Homeworkeer, POBX 5348-DP, Toms River, NJ 08753.

\$1000s Weekly Processing Mail From Home! Send Three First Class Stamps. Blumes, Box 5938, Richardson, TX 75083.

HOMEWORKERS NEEDED! TOP PAY! These words can mean FRAUD! Profitable homework is possible, but don't get taken! **FREE REPORT!** Send long SASE to: Consumer Network, Dept.-4, Box 8135, St. Paul, MN 55108.

\$60.00 per HUNDRED securing/stuffing envelopes!! Offer—details, rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial PA-22, X17410, Fort Lauderdale 33318.

SELL Books By Mail! \$50,000 Yearly! Free 80 Page Get Started Manual! Quality, Box 6060-PJ, Miller Place, NY 11764.

FIGHT INFLATION! Earn extra income. Details \$1 + Sase to: H. Lee, 55 Minor Terrace, Childersburg, AL 35044.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

EARN PROFITS! A revolutionary home-mailing program! Send a Sase to Miss Laurie Zertuche, 814 Pleasanton Rd. #203, San Antonio, Texas 78214.

\$1,000s WEEKLY possible processing mail! Start immediately! **FREE** supplies/postage! Rush stamped envelope! MLC, Box 3559-ZM, Danbury, CT 06813.

ALUMINUM Scrap—Recycle Yourself—Make up to \$25.00/Pound! Free information: Industrial-IO391, Box 127, Alexandria Bay, New York 13607.

DAILY PAYCHECK with Huge Profits. Free Wholesale Distributorship. Catalogs with thousands of fast selling items. Free Details: Jondy, Suite 3A, 6936 Longwood, Canton, MI 48187.

TREMENDOUS PROFITS selling products you import. Buy direct for your mail order, retail or wholesale business. Free information. AFE, 879 West Park, #228/IO1, Ocean, NJ 07712.

QUALITY MERCHANDISE BELOW WHOLESALE! Over 3500 Best-selling Items. Catalog \$5.00 (Refundable). MK Smith, P.O. Box 10609, Bradenton, FL 34282.

BE YOUR OWN BOSS. Operate profitable janitorial business. Unlimited opportunities. Free details: National Information Services, P.O. Box 61401, Vancouver, Washington 98666.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948. (415) 897-2742.

**YOU'LL MAKE
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—
BY READING and ANSWERING
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**

Classified Continued

EQ APRIL/91

PERSONAL—Cont'd

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

PEARLS Of The Orient Want To Write You. Details, Photos FREE, VIDEOS AVAILABLE. (#1 In Service Since 1979.) PAL, Blanca, CO 81123-0051. (719) 379-3228. 24 hrs.

ASIAN WOMEN desire friendship, marriage! Free details, photos! SUNSHINE INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE, Box 5500-HF, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii 96745. (808) 325-7707.

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH LADIES & ELIGIBLE GENTLEMEN seek American ladies & gentlemen for Friendship/Romance/Marriage! Free details: English Rose Agency, 2nd Floor, Mill Lane House, Mill Lane, Margate, Kent, England. Tel: 01144-843-290735.

PETS

WILL YOU STILL LOVE HIM TOMORROW? Get the pet right for you. CATS: (900) 535-2900 Touchtone Program 905; DOGS: Program 906. Each minute \$2. New message daily. Free questionnaire, send SASE: INFO-POWER, P.O. Box 4399, Garden Grove, CA 92642-4399.

RECIPES

TEN Tasty chicken recipes. Send \$5/Sase to: A. Roger, 384 Adirondack Drive, Farmingville, NY 11738.

RECIPES—Cont'd

SOUTHERN Pecan Pies. Best ever. Easy. \$1, SASE: Recipes, PO Box 3001, Meriden, MS 39303.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

BOOKS-ON-TAPE. Mysteries, Suspense, Thrillers. Plus hundreds of dollars worth of audio books in next 12 months, FREE. \$5 for preview cassette and details. Community Audio Productions, Rt. 2, Box 116N, Republic, MO 65738.

TRAVEL

SAVE money! Detailed info including toll-free numbers for budget motels, car rentals, airlines, etc. \$2.00 SASE to: Chandler, Box 576, New York, NY 10028.

CRUISE LOVERS BOOKLET. All you want to know about Top 50 cruise ships, special rates bulletin included. Mail \$6.00: CLA, P.O. Box 862278, Marietta, GA 30062.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:

Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.

For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager,
Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

NEXT ISSUE...

9 stories—including

PETER LOVESEY (about Miss Oyster Brown's crime)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Rand and Michael Vlado)

DOUG ALLYN (about a murder in Detroit)

and reprints by **JOHN DICKSON CARR**, **JON L. BREEN**,

and **ANTHONY BOUCHER** (writing as **H. H. HOLMES**)

ELEANOR SULLIVAN Editor
 RUSSELL ATWOOD Managing Editor
 TERRI CZECZKO Art Director
 RON KULINER Associate Art Director
 CAROLE DIXON Production Director
 DENNIS JONES Newsstand Operations
 Manager
 ELIZABETH BEATTY Circulation Director
 CYNTHIA MANSON Director of Marketing &
 Subsidiary Rights
 CHRIS DORBANDT ... Newsstand Marketing &
 Promotions Manager
 CONNIE SCARBOROUGH Contracts Manager
 VEENA RAGHAVAN Director
 Special Projects
 IRENE BOZOKI Classified Advertising Manager
 A. BRUCE CHATTERTON Advertising Director
 JUDY DORMAN Advertising Coordinator

JOEL DAVIS
 President

A. BRUCE CHATTERTON
 Publisher

JOE DeFALCO
 Vice President, Treasurer

CARL BARTEE
 Vice President, Manufacturing

MARY TZIMOKAS
 Vice President, Circulation

ELLERY QUEEN
 Editor-in-Chief
 (1941-1982)

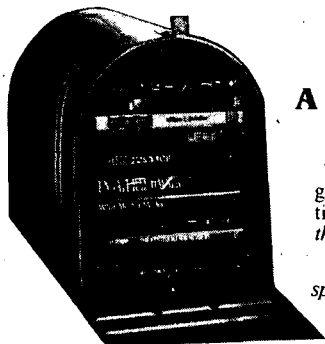
Advertising Sales Office

NEW YORK
 212-557-9100

NPA

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Vol. 97, No. 5, Whole No. 582. April 1991. Published every 28 days with special issues in March and October by Davis Publications, Inc., at \$2.25 a copy in the U.S.A., \$2.75 in Canada. 1 year subscription \$31.97 in U.S.A. and possessions, \$37.50 elsewhere, payable in advance and in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10168. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to Ellery Queen, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third-class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. © 1991 Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, IA 51591. In Canada return to 1801 South Cameron, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3E1. ISSN: 0013-6328. For back issues, send \$3.50 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462.

12 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES JUST \$1



A \$198.40 VALUE IN ORIGINAL PUBLISHERS' EDITIONS

That's right! We'd like you to enjoy \$198.40 worth of great new mystery and suspense novels, as your introduction to The Detective Book Club ... *for over 45 years, the unsurpassed value leader in mystery fiction.*

All 12 intriguing stories will be delivered to you in 4 specially-designed, easy-to-read triple volumes, available exclusively from The Detective Book Club for only \$1 plus shipping.

TOP QUALITY SELECTIONS AT UNBEATABLE PRICES

As a member you'll forget daily cares as you solve baffling murder cases, suspenseful whodunits, tense courtroom conflicts and more, all featuring the challenging plots and gripping action that are the hallmarks of today's most-read mystery masters like Dick Francis, Marian Babson, Michael Underwood plus many others ... chosen for Club members by our expert editors from among the more-than-400 mysteries published each year.

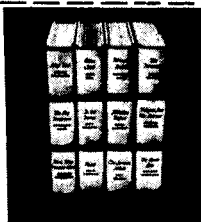
Best of all, each monthly Club selection (described in advance) is offered to you at *unequalled savings*. As a member, you're guaranteed 60% ... and often 70%, 80% or more ... off the original publishers' prices. Each selection includes three, newly-published novels in one handsome hardbound triple-volume edition for *only \$13.95. That's just \$4.65 per full-length mystery!*

NO RISK, NO OBLIGATION

When you become a member of The Detective Book Club, there is *no minimum number of books you must buy. You may reject any book before or after you receive it.* You may cancel your membership at any time, with no obligation. It's that simple.

SEND NO MONEY NOW

Simply fill out the coupon on this page and return it to The Detective Book Club, P.O. Box 404, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576. *But act now!* If you love great mysteries, it would be a crime not to accept this offer.



Yes, please enroll me as a member and send me my 4 triple-volumes shown here containing these 12 mysteries. I enclose no money now. I may examine my books for 10 days, then I will either accept all 4 volumes for only \$1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the Club's Preview describing my next selections. I will always have at least 30 days to reject any selection by returning the form provided. I may return any book within thirty days and owe nothing. For each triple-volume I keep, I will send you just \$13.95 plus shipping. I understand there are no minimum number of books I must buy and I may cancel my membership at any time.

91 - GM
D31M1

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

WALTER J. BLACK, INC.



ESTABLISHED IN 1951

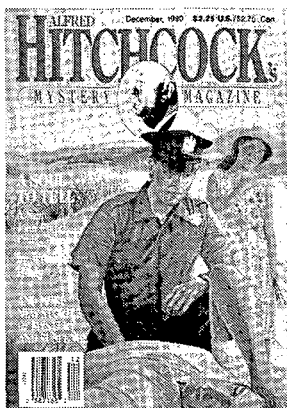
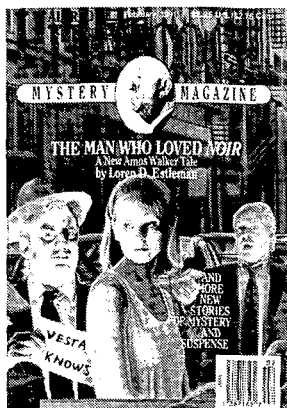
THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

P.O. Box 404, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576-0404

Since 1942, the best way to get more mystery for your money.

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



**QUENCH
YOUR
THIRST
FOR
MYSTERY**



**SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE UP TO
29% OFF THE BASIC PRICE**

CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-333-3311

Issues for only \$26.97—29% savings

12 issues for \$18.97—25% savings

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MVSQ-6

12 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES JUST \$1



See
last
page
for
details